# Impact of scaffolding on complexity and accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' narrative writing

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## Abstract

From the perspective of sociocultural theory (SCT), knowledge of an L2 is constructed and internalized through interaction. This is at odds with the "computational model" of learning that focuses on psycholinguistic processes isolated from social context. The present study was an attempt to investigate whether scaffolding, one of the key constructs of SCT, had any significant effect on complexity and accuracy of Iranian EFL leaners' narrative writing. Thirty eight (n=38) Iranian EFL learners learning English at a language institute within two intact groups (Experimental group=18, control group=20) took part in the study. The treatment lasted for one semester during which the participants wrote four narrative writings based on their course book. The writings of the two groups were rated in terms of syntactic complexity and accuracy. The results of the study showed that scaffolding turned out to have a significant effect on complexity and accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' narrative writing. In other words, the participants in the experimental group who experienced different kinds of scaffolding i.e. expert scaffolding, reciprocal scaffolding and self-scaffolding, could write more complex and more accurate narratives, as compared with those in the control group for whom scaffolding was not practiced.

Keywords: EFL, scaffolding, sociocultural theory, language teaching.

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## 1. Introduction

Sociocultural theory (SCT) has gained currency in language teaching and learning. Unlike cognitive approaches that focus on psycholinguistic processes and overemphasize the role of mind and individuals at the heart of the learning process, SCT has gone further to assert that although learning is a mental activity, it is through social interactions that cognitive development takes place. From the perspective of SCT, the social and cultural contexts in which learners are living are the mediators of learning and accordingly influence, to a great extent, the learners' knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978).

Lantolf (2000) argued that "mediated learning" is the key construct in SCT. Mediated learning is conceptualized on the assumption that learning does not take place exclusively inside the head of learners but rather it happens as the learners participate in the world which they are inhabiting . Mediation, as defined by Lantolf and Thorne (2006), is "the process through which humans deploy culturally constructed artifacts, concepts, and activities to regulate (i.e. gain voluntary control over and transform) the material world or their own and each other's social and mental activity".

Mediation can be primarily accomplished through verbal interactions (Ellis, 2008). Although interactions can arise in private speeches, they, most of the time, take place in the form of dialogs between an individual and other people. Researchers have explored the features of interactions that are conducive to learning (e.g., Foster & Ohta, 2005; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), and found that one of the main features of dialogic interactions that could explain how social interactions contribute to learning is "scaffolding". Scaffolding, taking a socioconstructivist view of human functioning, is thought to be interpsychological support in which a more capable person helps another less capable person to internalize what is being learned (Ko, Schallert & Walters, 2003). Given that the concept has been used numerously with different interpretations, Donato (2004) argued that the ubiquitous concept of scaffolding needs more investigations so as to shed light on conditions under which scaffolding arises and how it differs from other forms of assistance. In this regard, Maybin, Mercer, and Stierer (1992) maintained that for a help or support to be considered as scaffolding, it must meet two criteria. Firstly, there must be evidence to show that the learner finally can complete the task successfully through the guidance offered. Secondly, as a result of experiencing scaffolding, the leaner can achieve a greater level of independence and self-regulated learning in the future. In the same vein, Ko, Schallert and Walters (2003) held that the support or the guidance offered will not end up in learning or internalization unless it is appropriate for the current level of learners, and the learners show willingness to engage with the scaffolder. Furthermore, emphasizing that scaffolding needs to adopt new conceptualization in the age of technology, Yelland and Masters (2007) argued that leaners should not only be scaffolded cognitively to accomplish demanding tasks, but they should also be scaffolded affectively when encountering frustrating situations and technically when a wealth of learning resources are available to them.

It is assumed that if learners are scaffolded appropriately, they will actively participate and be engaged in leaning activities. Bodrova and Leong (1998) investigated scaffolding writing with 34 kindergarten children, and found that mechanisms of the transition from assisted to independent performance took place through scaffolding. In a study in which two learners worked collaboratively and reciprocally extended support in revising a narrative text written by one of them, De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) witnessed the emergence of self-regulation on the part of the writer. They argued that scaffolding not only supported the learners during the task completion process, but it also helped their independent performance in the future. Arguing along the same line, Rose, Lui-Chivizhe, McKnight and Smith (2003) held that scaffolding can increase the leaners' engagement in the task. Thus, it can be argued that scaffolding makes a bridge between an individual and the social aspect of learning. That is to say, learners are assisted through interactions during the learning process with the hope that they will subsequently become self-regulated and independently capable of scaffolding themselves (Berk, & Winsler, 1995; Holton & Clarke, 2006).

However, despite the contribution of SCT to the language teaching and learning process, its significance has not been fully recognized and accordingly its practice has encountered challenges in Asian contexts. culture of learning, beliefs in regard with what learning and teaching are and how they should take place, teaching philosophy, teacher identity, teaching practices and methodologies are in one way or another associated with the extent to which SCT receives a welcome or rejection in an educational system. Wong (2004) argued that "spoon-feeding" and teacher-centered style of learning is dominant in Asian contexts. All required information is provided by the teacher and so the learners do not need to look for more knowledge by themselves. Under such a belief, the peers are thought to have no significant role in the construction of knowledge, and leaners are reluctant to cooperate with each other.

Iran is no exception to this malady. Prevailing teaching practices employed by Iranian EFL teachers apparently show that the importance of social interaction in learning has not been recognized yet. From the outset, leaners are fed with the belief that learning is a path to pursue individually and construction of knowledge is a mental activity to be carried out or explored individually. Investigating teacher role identity of Iranian EFL teachers teaching at language institutes, Rahimi and Askari Bigdeli (2014) found that teachers' harmony or disharmony with institutional policies and ideologies massively influenced their beliefs about teaching and learning. Also, Rahimi and Chabok (2013) argued that despite the fact that Iranian English teachers underscored the significance of learner-centered approach to language teaching, they were somehow willing to be the authority in their classes. The conventional teaching methods are preferred in which they as the authorities presented the information and the students passively absorbed it. Yet, other studies in the context of Iran indicated the prominence of the tenets of SCT and their contributing roles in mediating the language learning process. Examining the contribution of scaffolding in Iranian EFl classes, Rahimi and Tahmasebi (2010), found that scaffolding was useful methods to mediate language learners in improving EFL learners' reading skills. In another study that highlighted the importance of perceived social support, Rahimi and Askari Bigdeli (2014) argued that social support from teachers, family and friends can provide EFL learners with effective copying skills manifested as resilience in confrontation with unwelcoming stressful tasks and challenges in the process of language learning.

In the light of these considerations, the present study was to find out if scaffolding as theorized by Holton and Clarke (2006) had any significant impact on Iranian EFL learners' narrative writing. In effect, the purpose of the present study was to find out whether complexity and accuracy of EFL learners' narrative writing could be influenced by scaffolding.

*1.2 Theoretical framework*

Holton and Clarke (2006) theorized three types of scaffolding, namely exert scaffolding, reciprocal scaffolding, and self-scaffolding that operate in two scaffolding domains: conceptual scaffolding and heuristic scaffolding.

*1.2.1 Conceptual scaffolding and heuristic scaffolding*

As for scaffolding domains, conceptual scaffolding is provided with the aim of constructing and promoting conceptual understanding and development of scaffoldees in the area or the topic in question. Heuristic scaffolding refers to "development of heuristics for learning or problem solving, that transcend specific content" (Holton & Clarke, 2006, p. 134). In other words, while conceptual scaffolding relates to helping scaffoldees to understand concepts and content, heuristic scaffolding provides scaffoldees with approaches that may be taken to carry out a task or solve a problem. However, it should be noted that there is not always a clear-cut distinction between the two domains and, as pointed out by Holton and Clarke (2006, p.134), "it may not be possible for an act of scaffolding to be associated purely with concepts or heuristics."

### 1.2.2 Expert scaffolding

Instructional scaffolding plays a major role in developing learners' cognitive competencies. "Situations of expert scaffolding involve a scaffolder with specific responsibility for the learning of others" (Holton & Clarke, 2006, p. 134). The expert, here a teacher, uses skills and knowledge to conceptually or heuristically guide or scaffold scaffoldees to find the result for themselves. In regard with the role of expert scaffolding, Chi (2007) analyzed and compared scaffolding strategies employed by two EFL teachers in the process of instructing learners, and tried to identify the most effective scaffolding strategies employed by teachers to students. The results showed effective utilization of scaffolding strategy in the process of instruction students' reading comprehension boosted students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, Van de Pol, Volman and Beishuizen (2010) discussed the concept of scaffoliding in terms of cognitive gap it is supposed to fill. It is used by experts or teachers to bridge a cognitive gap or progress in their learning to a higher level. Moreover, Sawyer (2006) stated that instructional scaffolding is an instrument developed to create higher levels of leaning in students. In this sense, scaffolding is the help and attention given during the learning process which is in line with students' educational needs and goals. Introduction and explication of subjects are carried out through provision informative and encouraging feeback.  Cotterall and Cohen (2003) depicted the significance of challenging and exciting scaffolding procedure on students' task involvement and motivation and ultimately betterment of their production.

### 1.2.3 Reciprocal scaffolding

Group activities entail harmony and concerted efforts as well as adequate interaction among the member of the community. "Situations of reciprocal scaffolding take place where two (or more) people are involved in working collaboratively on a common task. This may be a problem or a situation involving the learning of new content knowledge" (Holton & Clarke, 2006, p. 136). Support or guidance that learners offer to other peers to carry out a task, solve a problem, or reach a goal is counted as reciprocal scaffolding. This kind of scaffolding that may involve both conceptual and heuristic scaffolding takes place in the classroom when learners are working cooperatively in pairs or in groups. One person in the group, usually the more capable one, plays the role of an expert and scaffolds other peers. However, this situation is not stable but rather fluid and transient, with the expert role changing from moment to moment and from task to task. The fluid nature of reciprocal scaffolding passing from one person to another and the collective involvement of all members in scaffolding the other peers help the group to draw on different experiences and knowledge required for task completion.

### 1.2.4 Self-scaffolding

"An individual is able to provide scaffolding for her(him)self when any problem or concept that is new to the individual is being tackled" (Holton & Clarke, 2006, p. 136). Generally, as argued by Holton and Clarke (2006), self-scaffolders will not have the same conceptual and heuristic understanding as an expert does. Nor will they know how to approach a task or problem. However, what self-scaffolders have and help them to exceed the ability of the other two types of scaffolders is self-knowledge. That is to say, self-scaffolders know their current level in terms of content and heuristic knowledge. So they know what procedures or solutions to a task are already based in their knowledge and available to them and what needs to be acquired. These things are not always known to expert scaffolders that can sometimes lead to abortive scaffolding based on the wrong assumption.

The present study addressed the following research questions.

1. Does scaffolding (expert scaffolding, reciprocal scaffolding, and self-scaffolding) have any significant impact on complexity of Iranian EFL learners' narrative writing?

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2. Does scaffolding (expert scaffolding, reciprocal scaffolding, and self-scaffolding) have any significant impact on accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' narrative writing?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

Thirty eight Iranian EFL learners (23 females and 15 males) learning English at a language institute took part in the study. At the time of the study the participants, ranged in ages from 14 to 16, had been learning English for 6 to 9 semesters (each semester took almost three months) at the language institute and for about three years at school. Due to the prevailing traditional and grammar-based language teaching methodologies in schools, Iranian EFL learners cannot develop language proficiency required for communication in the real world. For the same reason, they attend language institutes beyond their school time to improve their communicative ability in English.

Because it was beyond the realm of possibility to randomly assign the learners to two groups, the intact-group design was utilized in the study. Thus, one group comprised of 18 learners was taken as the experimental group and another group of 20 learners as the control group.

### 2.2 Material

The teaching material used with the participants, based on the institute curriculum, was the book Hip Hip Hooray! 5 (2nd edition) by Eisele, Eisele, Hanlon, and Hanlon (2012). The Hip Hip Hooray! series is a multi-level course features classic stories to motivate young learners to learn English. One big advantage of the series is the full digital support that can extend practice in and out of class and strengths home-school connection.

Hip Hip Hooray! (5) contains eight stories. The stories are about a family (Willson family) whose boat sinks and they have to live on an Island for a couple of weeks. The family has an eventful life on the Island, as depicted through stories and the pictures, before they are rescued. For one reason or another, the authors had not written about all events, as displayed by the pictures, and chosen only some parts for the stories. In other words, the stories were potentially pregnant with more events awaiting the closure provided by the readers. This means that the learners could use the pictures to expand and extend the stories and accordingly move from what Sulzby (1985, p. 462) has called a "picture-governed" to a "text-governed" approach to constructing meaning.

### 2.3 Procedure

The present study took place within one semester. In the control group, the teacher, first, played the CD for the participants to listen to the story. Then, he asked them to repeat in chorus some parts he deemed difficult. Following that, the teacher read on the story and clarified the meanings of unknown words with explanation, gestures, drawing pictures, or sometimes translation. Finally, the participants adopting the story characters role played the stories in class and as an out-of-classroom assignment they had to write a summary of all the eight stories in four parts. After finishing every two stories the participants handed their summaries to the teacher.

In the experimental group, each participant after experiencing different types of scaffolding wrote four narrative writings to be submitted to the teacher. The participants wrote narrative writings based on the eight stories of Hip Hip Hooray! (5). To write the narratives, the participants were to expand and extend the stories through different stages of scaffolding and create richer stories covering most of the events in the stories. What follows is the procedures took place in every stage of scaffolding.

### 2.3.1 Expert scaffolding

The purpose of conceptual scaffolding is to advance and promote conceptual understanding of the learners by providing content information. In this study, the teacher scaffolded construction of knowledge in regard to narrative writing by providing information about what narrative writing was and how it should be written. As the teacher provided explanation about narrative writing, the learners were asked to share their experience if they had ever written narratives. Some learners had the experience and had written some narratives in their mother tongue (Persian).

The teacher presented a model of narrative writing in order to help the learners to establish background knowledge. It was assumed that providing real examples of narrative writing either by the teacher or by the learners could contribute to construction of the learners' conceptual and heuristic knowledge as well as help them to become familiar with the main features of narrative writing. Ellis (2005) discusses the idea of planning, that is, task rehearsal, pre-task planning and within-task planning and their influence on the manner and quality of production.

### 2.3.2 Reciprocal scaffolding

The teacher explained how the learners should go through this stage. During this scaffolding, the learners worked cooperatively in groups and exchanged information about how to recount the events of the story in their narrative writing. The learners' exchanges were mostly focused on such aspects as word choice, syntax, and semantic. As a matter of fact, more capable learners provided a kind of expert scaffolding to their less capable peers and this role changed as they were talking about different aspects of their writings.

When reciprocal scaffolding ended, the learners who had worked in group presented their narrative writing to the whole class and received some feedbacks from the teacher and other peers. Most of the feedbacks dealt with content or linguistic features of the learners' narrative writing.

### 2.3.3 Self-scaffolding

This type of scaffolding done for the most part out of classroom was carried out individually by the learners themselves, in which they had to look for information in such different sources as surfing the Internet, sending emails to their teachers or peers, consulting different books. This helped them to consolidate knowledge they had acquired or constructed earlier through expert-scaffolding and reciprocal-scaffolding. Also, self-scaffolding helped the learners to evaluate their current level of understanding about the narrative writing and further gave them a chance to recall the information already provided and exchanged in the context of classroom.

This type of scaffolding was noticeable when the learners wanted to organize, reorganize, and reflect on what they have done in class to expand and enrich their narrative writings to be submitted to the teacher.

## 3. Data analysis

The researchers collected the narrative writings from both groups and rated them according to the two measures of syntactic complexity and accuracy. Syntactic complexity was measured by the ratio of clauses to T-units (Ellis & Yuan, 2003). T-unit was defined by Hunt (1965, p. 20) as "a main clause plus any subordinating clauses". As pointed out by Ishikawa (2006), ellipsis and sentence fragments are not counted as T-units. The measure of accuracy was carried out by counting the number of error-free T-units (Larsen- Freeman, 2006). By error-free T-units, it means T-units that are free from syntax, morphology, lexical choice, and spelling errors.

## 4. Results

The purpose of this study was to find out whether scaffolding, as theorized by Holton and Clarke (2006), had any significant impact on complexity and accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' narrative writing. Overall, the results presented below show that scaffolding significantly influenced complexity and accuracy of the participants' narrative writing in the experimental group, as compared to those in the control group.

The first research question was to find out if scaffolding significantly influenced complexity of the learners' narrative writing. Table 1 and Figure 1 display the descriptive statistics for the complexity of narrative writings in the experimental and the control groups. As indicated in Table 1 and Figure 1 below, the mean scores of the participants in the experimental group are higher in all four narrative writings than those in the control group.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for complexity of narrative writing in both groups

|  | Narrative 1 | | Narrative 2 | | Narrative 3 | | Narrative 4 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N=38 | Mean | Std. | Mean | Std. | Mean | Std. | Mean | Std. |
| Experimental group (N=18) | 2.5600 | .31444 | 2.7756 | .24917 | 3.0750 | .17175 | 3.3850 | .16989 |
| Control group (N=20) | 1.4145 | .19102 | 1.4915 | .17218 | 1.5520 | .20786 | 1.8200 | .24855 |

Figure 1 shows that the participants in the both group experienced an improvement in their writing and there was increase in complexity of their writing as they moved from narrative 1 to narrative 4. However, the increase in complexity of writing in the experimental group due to the practice of scaffolding was considerably higher than that in the control group.
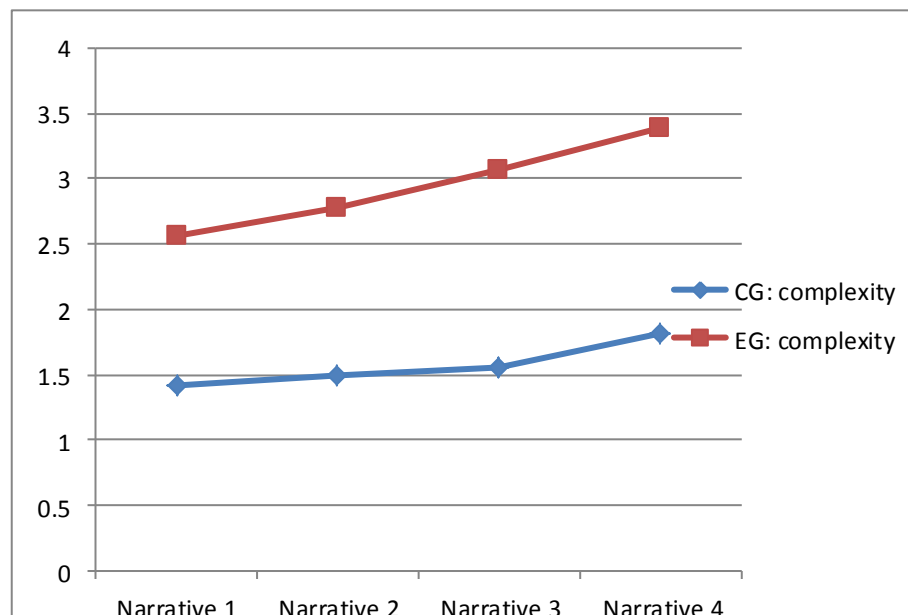


Figure 1 complexity of narrative writing in both groups

EG: Experimental Group
CG: control Group

To find out whether the observed difference between the two groups' mean scores was significant, Independent Sample t-Test was run. Table 2 shows that the difference between the mean scores of the two groups was significant (t (28) = 4.225, p =.004.) and thus scaffolding practiced with the experimental group (M=11.7956, Std. = .8516) enabled the participants, in comparison with those in the control group (M=6.278, Std. = .4507), to significantly increase complexity of their narrative writings.

Table 2. Independent Samples Test for complexity of narrative writing

|  |  | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Lower | Upper |
| Complexity | Equal variances assumed | 5.563 | .024 | 25.324 | 36 | .000 | 5.51756 | .21788 | 5.07568 | 5.95943 |
|  | Equal variances not assumed |  |  | 24.564 | 25.216 | .000 | 5.51756 | .22462 | 5.05515 | 5.97996 |

The second research question was to find out whether scaffolding significantly influenced accuracy of the learners' narrative writing. Table 3 and Figure 2 demonstrate that the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of accuracy of their narrative writings. In all four narratives, the experimental group's mean scores were higher than those of the control group.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for accuracy of narrative writing in both groups

|  | Narrative 1 | | Narrative 2 | | Narrative 3 | | Narrative 4 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N=38 | Mean | Std. | Mean | Std. | Mean | Std. | Mean | Std. |
| Experimental group (N=18) | 13.2222 | 2.62467 | 15.5556 | 1.72259 | 18.7778 | 1.43714 | 21.6667 | 2.40098 |
| Control group (N=20) | 8.3000 | 2.00263 | 9.9000 | 1.58612 | 10.2000 | 1.82382 | 12.2000 | 2.16673 |

Like their performance in terms of complexity, as Figure 2 depicts, the two groups as reaching the end of the semester could write more accurate narratives. However, this amount was mush considerable in the writing of the experimental group. As the figure shows, the experimental group substantially increased accuracy of their writing.
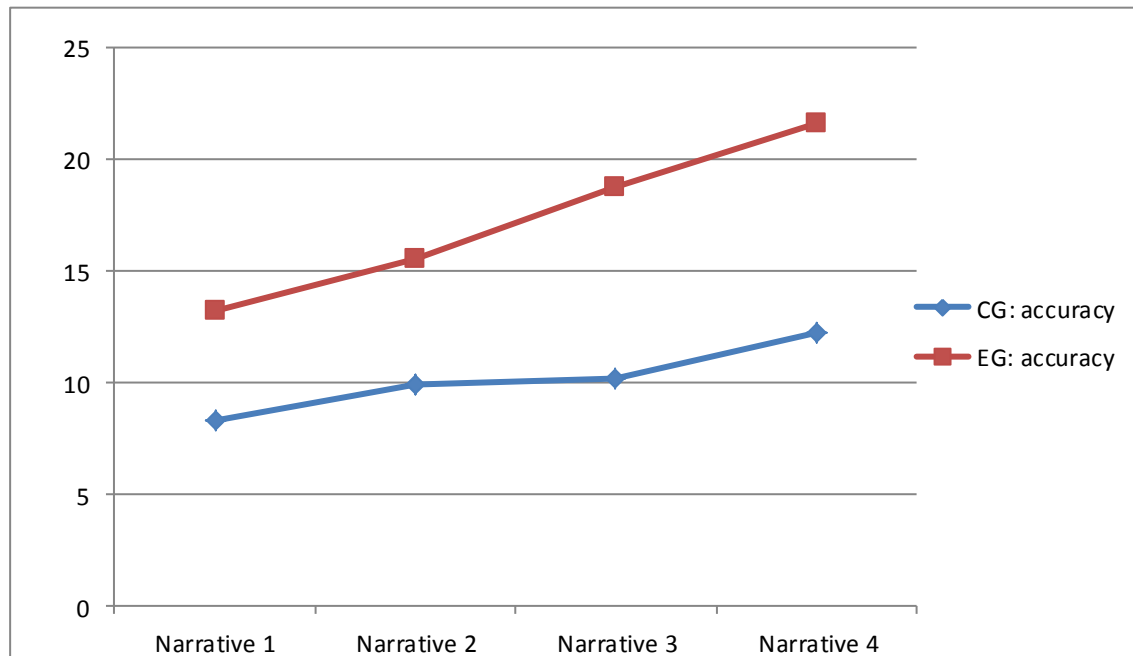
Figure 2. accuracy of narrative writing in both groups

In order to find out if the difference between the groups' mean scores was significant, Independent Sample t-Test was run. The result in Table 4 indicates that there was a significant difference in accuracy of narrative writings (t (28) = 4.225, p =.004.) between the experimental group (M=69.2222, Std. = 5.9562) and the control group (M=40.6, Std. =4.0833).

Table 4. Independent Samples Test for accuracy of narrative writing

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| accuracy _exp | Equal variances assumed | 2.466 | .125 | 17.428 | 36 | .000 | 28.62222 | 1.64234 | 25.29141 | 31.95304 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 17.091 | 29.673 | .000 | 28.62222 | 1.67470 | 25.20044 | 32.04401 |

Taking together, as the results obtained from the present study suggest, scaffolding turned out to have a significant effect on complexity and accuracy of Iranian EFL learners' narrative writing. In other words, the participants in the experimental group who experienced different kinds of scaffolding (i.e. expert scaffolding, reciprocal scaffolding and self-scaffolding) could write more complex and more accurate narratives, as compared with those in the control group in which scaffolding was not practiced.

## 5. Discussion and concluding remarks

Scaffolding involves the pedagogical interventions, cognitive or affective, intended to offer aid to a learner who finds a situation difficult to understand or a task difficult to carry out. The importance of scaffolding in helping language learners to improve different aspects of the second or foreign language has been widely underscored (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Gibbons, 2002; Ohta, 1995; Walqui, 2006, to name just a few). From this perspective, learning is not viewed and treated as an individual endeavor taking place and explored individually, but rather it is through taking part in interactions and sociocultural contexts that learning takes place and by doing so individuals construct and internalize knowledge. However, in Asian contexts due to the existence of quite different conceptualization of learning which for the most part relies on individualistic construction of knowledge rather than on cooperation and interaction, the act of learning is thought to be explored individually on the part of the learners. In the same vein, education in an Iranian context has still persisted with the conventional teaching methods that emphasize teachers' authority and unilateral instructions whereas students assume the role of passive information receivers (Rahimi & Chabok, 2013).

In the present study, it was assumed that by involving and engaging the Iranian EFL learners in different types of scaffolding as employed and practiced in the study, complexity and accuracy of their narrative writing, as compared with those of the control group, would significantly improve. The results of the study supported this assumption. Complexity and accuracy of the learners' narrative writing in the experimental group increased gradually through narrative 1 to narrative 4. The same held true for the learners' in the control group. However, improvement and increase in complexity and accuracy of the experimental group's narrative writing was significantly higher than that in the control group. This suggests that the leaners in the experimental group developed more complex and more accurate writings probably due to assistance, either conceptual, heuristic, or both, that they received from expert scaffolding, reciprocal scaffolding, or self-scaffolding. It is assumed that the three kinds of scaffolding played a part in helping the learners to develop and present their ideas in complex and accurate ways. In expert scaffolding, the teacher helped the learners to construct understanding or knowledge of narrative writing. This scaffolding was carried out carefully as it was the basic level of scaffolding and the teacher tried to spend a good amount of time to provide a conceptual understanding of narrative writing. This was done by offering good samples of narrative, by explaining a model of narrative wiring, and by drawing on the leaners' experience. Moreover, the steps to writing a narrative, the common tenses and phrases used to describe events in a chronological order, and how to establish a particular point of view for the narrative by the learners were provided in the expert scaffolding stage. As a matter of fact, through this scaffolding a learning foundation was created before the learners were expected to proceed into the other stages. Later on the learners in discussion with their peers and through getting feedback from the teacher and other peers on their presentations consolidated their understanding about narrative writing. In the end, the learners moved from acting as a scaffoldee to acting as a scaffolder consolidating and internalizing their knowledge by means of finding and using resources currently available to them out of classroom in order to improve their narrative writing.

Thus, it is postulated that expert scaffolding, reciprocal scaffolding and self-scaffolding along with conceptual and heuristic scaffolding assisted the learners in the experimental group to develop their ideas and accordingly write more complex and more accurate narratives. In this

regard, the results of the study are in accord with those of Bodrova and Leong (1998) who conducted a case study with 34 kindergarten children and found that the scaffolded writings of the children were more advanced than those produced unassisted. "The progress [of scaffolded writings] was demonstrated in the use of more advanced appearing forms of writing, increased use of invented spelling, and increased length and quality of the messages" (Bodrova & Leong, 1998, p. 15). Also the study makes a case for supporting Rose, Lui-Chivizhe, McKnight and Smith (2003) who found that while the students struggled and were previously reluctant to participate in writing practice, once they were involved in scaffolding writing, there was a growing awareness of how to (re)organize as well as use and analyze information to be used in their writing. In the same vein, conducting a study in which the language learners acted as the authors and editors of magazines, Schweitzer (2010) found that scaffolding writing techniques with the learners' ZPDs facilitated the development of writing skills.

The present study suggests that foreign language teaching in an Iranian context needs to formulate new conceptualization of learning which is based on the view that learning for the most part takes place through interactions, and cognitive development is much dependent on the degree or amount of interaction in which learners are involved. This means that language teachers by providing scaffolding and by encouraging the learners to cooperate with each other can not only help mediate construction of knowledge but they can also pave the way for students' long term construction of knowledge, higher level of thinking and self-regulated learning, which can be independently pursued and explored by the learners themselves. Moreover, decontextualized learning and teaching of any skill or idea and, more specifically, the components of language proficiency is an ineffective pedagogical approach. The sociocultural characteristics of any educational setting specifying the trend and pattern of interactions among students and significant others, e.g. teachers, parents, authorities and peers, can tremendously augment the act of learning. Scaffolding can bolster students' cognitive and affective capitals through the provision of the relevant impetus to them to logically and zestfully launch and proceed their learning techniques and strategies. The findings of this study portrayed the fact that scaffolding can be employed to enhance the general learning activity and specifically students' performance on certain skills such as narrative writing. Scaffolding is implemented to increase the depth, systematicity and tenacity of the learning procedure which takes place under supportive situations both mentally and emotionally. More particularly, in an Iranian educational setting, the application of the proper scaffolding specified through comprehensive needs analysis with the proper focus on interaction can be a huge stride in motivating students and helping them attain their educational objectives. It may be pointed out, however, that different kinds of scaffolding should be employed based upon the specificities of students' personality types, learning strategies, cognitive mechanisms coupled with the particularities of the nature of organizational cultures entailing certain successful interactional mechanisms and practices. A kind of interaction between students and teachers is construed and constructed reciprocally and collaboratively germane with students' weaknesses, strengths and course objectives.

In an Iranian EFL context, students' educational needs must be thoroughly perceived before the specification of proper facilitative scaffolding. To do so, the essential elements of context, input, materials, and output must be meticulously identified and viably assessed. Hence, foreign language learning turns out to be an exciting enlivening experience leading to profound internalization of concepts, deep levels of thinking and creativity, until students have acquired certain level of autonomy and self-regulation rendering perpetual constant input superfluous. More, particularly, with respect to Iranian narrative writing, scaffolding can hugely flourish EFL learners' complexity and accuracy in narrative writing tasks, should the input and feedback be in concert with students' zone of proximal development . By and large, a plethora of scaffolding techniques encapsulating expert scaffolding, reciprocal scaffolding and self-scaffolding can be effective instructional teaching tools utilized to build up students' writing competency. The support presented clarifies the characteristics of the task and this disambiguation strategy can obliterate or in the least curb students' demotivation and disillusionment. This can play a pivotal role in outstanding advancement of writing skill in the long run. The appropriate scaffolding techniques enable students to express themselves more precisely and sophisticatedly. Clay

(2005) shows that what may seem like casual conversational exchanges between teacher and student can offer many opportunities for fostering cognitive development, language learning, story composition for writing, and reading comprehension. By the same token, Smagorinsky (2007), believes that the right kind of scaffolding in the form of conversations strengthens generative, constructive, experimental, and developmental speech and writing in the act of creating new concepts and ideas.

Hence, suitable sensible scaffolding tailored to students' psychological developments and intellectual capacities solidifies the correct comprehension of constructs and makes innovative production of ideas a much more advanced, precise and rational procedure. Precision and sophistication of linguistic production are inextricably tied up with the acquisition of higher orders of thinking such as critical thinking. More often than not, these skills increase in tandem, that is, there is a close interconnection and interaction among these elements and skills which can be smoothly incrementally developed provided the experts in the filed adopt the scaffolding techniques which are attuned to student's current cerebral and affective competencies. These are the same skills a research academic would be expected to have as they determine the accuracy and worth of a knowledge claim (Beyer, 1985). In addition, Zone of Proximal Development plays a crucial role in learning  and teaching of listening, reading, speaking and writing. As Wass and  Harland (2011) clearly state,  students could  expand  their ZPD for critical thinking through verbal scaffolding and conversation with lecturers and peers. In the Iranian EFL situation, the increase in students' accuracy and sophistication of narrative writing may not have taken place without the prior relevant ZDP expansion intimately tied up with the interaction and conversations with teachers as efficient form of instructional scaffolding. This study is in fact a corroboration of the impact of a number of scaffolding techniques on learning and production of certain skills. To put it briefly,   Iranian EFL learners' narrative writing was buttressed in terms of precision and structural sophistication with the support and reinforcement of expert scaffolding, reciprocal scaffolding and self-scaffolding. The findings of this study can benefit EFL teachers, materials developers, curriculum designers and assessment specialists. To learn a language   properly, one should take part in genuine authentic social interactions. Teachers and educators need to be wary the fact that mere transmission of knowledge to students is not a productive pragmatically acceptable manner in pedagogy. They need to provide students with consistent relevant scaffolding to be able to immensely improve the efficacy of their teaching techniques and procedures. Further studies can be conducted to expound the nuances of this interconnection concerning variable such as age, gender, ethnic background, religious affiliations, emotional intelligence, motivation, attitude, etc.

It is worth noting that the findings of the present study should be viewed in light of its limitations. This study was carried out within a small scale including two intact groups who were no representative of the whole Iranian EFL learners. Thus, the findings are limited to learners with characteristics similar to those participating in this study. And given that the analysis in the present study has focused on the linguistic features of the learners' narrative writing, future studies should also take into consideration discourse-level written features so as to further a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of scaffolding on EFL leaners' narrative writing.

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