

Impact Of Scaffolding Technique On Writing Skills Of Efl Learners Studying In An Esl Intercultural Communication Context

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Abstract

The basic objective of this study was to explore how scaffolding technique impacts upon the writing skills of English as foreign language (EFL) learners in an English as second language (ESL) intercultural communication context. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) define ‘scaffolding’ as the support given in the process of learning to facilitate learners in achieving challenging levels of comprehension that might be difficult without some support. Employing quantitative approach, a single group pre-test and post-test quasi experimental research method is used to conduct this study. In order to gauge the effect of scaffolding technique on the writing skills of EFL learners, twenty-nine Iraqi learners, whose native language is Arabic and they were enrolled in customized English language proficiency and communication skills course, formed a single understudied group for this study. A pre-test was conducted on the group to assess their initial level of writing skills. Scaffolding technique was then used during the training to improve the participants’ English writing skills. Later, post-test was conducted to assess their level of writing skills after the intervention. One sample T-Test was used as a statistical technique. The results of the study showed that the EFL learners scored significantly higher after they were taught using scaffolding technique to improve their writing skills in an ESL intercultural communication context. In order to use scaffolding technique successfully, it is important that teachers provide learners with the

optimum assistance that might be required for the completion of the task, and then gradually reduce the level of support until learners become skilled in completing the task independently.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, Scaffolding technique, foreign language learners, ESL classrooms.

Introduction

English is a global lingua franca which connects not only individuals but also nations of the world. It has emerged as a tool that is used for exchange of ideas, knowledge and information among individuals worldwide. “English has gained inevitable importance being the international language” as a result, English has become one of the most spoken languages in this globalized era which allows individuals from different parts of the world to experience intercultural connections (Raja, 2013, p. 154). According to Byram (2008), individuals who speak English are global citizens and they act as intercultural speakers who exchange social realities in each other’s cultures. English, being an international lingua franca, has facilitated individuals living in one global society to learn intercultural norms as a result of exchange of ideas, knowledge and information not only with native speakers, but also with second language and foreign language speakers of English. The likelihood of coming across individuals from different cultures in our day to day communication is bigger than ever before where learners engage themselves in an English as foreign language (EFL) and learners in an English as second language (ESL) context and communicate in English as a common language (Barnett and Lee 2002; Jensen 2003; Spitzberg 2000).

According to Maybin, Mercer, and Stierer (1992) “the term ‘scaffolding’ was originally used by Bruner as a metaphor for depicting the form and quality of the effective intervention by a ‘learned’ person in the learning of another person”. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) define ‘scaffolding’ as the support given in the process of learning to facilitate learners in achieving challenging levels of comprehension that might be difficult without some support. Similarly, Mulatsih (2011) suggests that scaffolding in a teaching learning environment is a procedure in which learners are initially provided provisional framework for learning and once the required skills are developed, the provisional framework is withdrawn. According to Raja (2015), a large number of foreign language learners of English demonstrate their limitations in EFL writing classes through sentences that are vaguely constructed. Raja (2015) further states that an emergent trend in the exploration of scaffolding in the procedure of students’ learning has been lately observed globally. Scaffolding enables teachers to aid learners gradually shift from tasks that require assistance to tasks that require learners to perform independently (Bliss and Askew, 1996; Bodrova and Leong, 1998; Palincsar, 1998). Scaffolding technique offers students’ adequate supervision until the procedure is learned; later the assistance is gradually taken away from the students so that the responsibility is transferred to them for the completion of the task. For its success, a basic layout should be constructed. The learners should be given maximum assistance required for the completion of the task, and then gradually extent of the support should be reduced until the learners

become capable of accomplishing the task independently (Bodrova and Leong, 1998; Elicker, 1995).

Rational and Purpose of the study:

It has been established that intercultural communication could play a major role in the acquisition and learning of English language. Given the growing influence of English in the global village, it is important to investigate if the learning of English is only affected positively in the English as native language (ENL) context or if it is significantly affected positively in the ESL context. Unlike the ENL context, where EFL learners of English language remains surrounded with English language and they get immense opportunities to interact interculturally using English, the ESL context offers EFL learners a language that is different from English to communicate interculturally in the host country. Knowing that the host culture does not demand the EFL learners to force themselves to speak English for intercultural communication because the host language is different from the target language, EFL learners might feel nervous and hesitant to practice the target language.

Therefore, this study aims to make an effort to fill the research gap in the existing literature, especially in the ESL context where insufficient number of studies have been reported to have investigated the impact of scaffolding technique on the writing skills of foreign language learners of English in an English as a second language intercultural communication context using a quantitative approach. This study targets EFL learners coming from Iraq and studying in Pakistan, which offers an ESL context, with an aim of investigating how scaffolding technique impacts upon the writing skills of EFL learners of English in an ESL intercultural communication context. The researchers' endeavour is to achieve this purpose using a single group pretest-posttest quasi experimental research design.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis given below was established to address and fill the gap in existing literature in the ESL context.

H₁ There is a significant difference in the mean scores of pretest and posttest of the EFL learners writing skills who are exposed to Scaffolding technique in an ESL intercultural communication context

Research question

This investigation deemed to explore the following research question:

Is there a significant difference in the mean scores of pretest and posttest of the EFL learners writing skills who are exposed to Scaffolding technique in an ESL intercultural communication context?

Literature Review

Umrani, Panhwar and Brohi (2017) assert that ‘language learning is perceived as contribution in a fresh culture’ (p.46). However, it is important on part of learners that intercultural competence must also be mastered along with linguistic competence. Moeller and Nugent (2014) state that the necessity for an intercultural attention in language education has been increasingly recognized in the present day global village where migration and immigration has become common. According to Hammer et al (2003), intercultural competence is the aptitude to mediate and act in ways that are interculturally apt. Alred and Byram (2002) explain that intercultural competence is the aptitude of an individual to transform his/her knowledge, and attitude in other cultures which has developed into a pertinent issue in the present day globalized society. Similarly, Taylor (1994) states that it is a process through which individuals adapt and alter their perception not only to comprehend but also to adjust to the demands of the host culture.

Likewise, Byram (1997) states that the aptitude of foreign language learners to communicate in their native language with individuals from other cultures is multicultural competence. Shahriar, Mari and Umrani (2015) assert that to be successful, blending into the target culture is an utmost necessity for language learners, so that they could appropriately use the language in the target culture.

Substantial consideration must also be paid for the enhancement of the intercultural communicative competence (ICC). ICC is an important skill that individuals of the current era require for survival in the multicultural communication context (Tran and Seepho, 2015). It is an individual’s capability to communicate with individuals from different cultures; however, this communication does not take place in the native language of the speaker; it is done in a foreign language. The ability of being mindful of the person from other culture is connected to language competence which enables individuals to use the language aptly and to be aware of values and connotation of the language (Aguilar, 2010). For developing this skill and achieving the goal of transforming oneself into an effective intercultural communicator, learners needs to intensely involve themselves in the intercultural communicate.

According to Piller (2007), as intercultural communication characteristically involves the usage of foreign languages, they are one of the areas that have always remained significant in intercultural communication studies. Similarly, Olson and Kreoger (2001) state that foreign language learning can escalate intercultural competence; therefore, in order to develop intercultural communication skills, foreign language proficiency should be deemed central and a requisite to it. Several studies have revealed that inadequate level of proficiency of languages of individuals in intercultural

communication encounters often result in misunderstandings, specifically the dominant language as well as inadequate cognizance of various contextualization cues (Birkner and Kern 2000; Humphrey 2007; Kramsch 1986; Roberts 2000; Roberts et al. 2005). According to Aba (2015), one of the central components of effective intercultural communication is language proficiency; however, several studies have revealed that intercultural competence is not necessarily augmented with an increase in precision in the target language.

Hao and Zhang (2009) conducted a study on the intercultural competence of college students and explored that despite being associated with English language learning for a little over a decade, the students remained unsuccessful in refining their intercultural mindfulness and frequently remained unable to respond aptly in intercultural communication contexts. In another study conducted by Sebnem, Dicle and A. Guldem (2009), university students' education, intercultural sensitivity & experience on the development of intercultural communicative competence was analyzed. The results of the study showed that respect of students for other cultures increases when they get engaged in interaction in the target language.

Similarly, Marek (2009) asserted in his study that the culture of the target language is an important constituent in the course of successful language learning; therefore, teacher must use it in their classrooms. Likewise, Moloney (2007) undertook a longitudinal study to investigate the features of intercultural competence in young language learners who were engaged in a language teaching project that was eight-year long. The results showed considerable growth in the intercultural ability of the learners which took place via familiarity with foreign language, culture and identity. This study used foreign language learning for the enhancement of intercultural communication.

Godwin-Jones (2013) investigated the integration of intercultural competence in foreign language teaching in the United States. The results revealed that students considered culture different from language. The teachers might also ignore the cultural issues of L2 and on cultural aspects of L1. The findings of Godwin-Jones stress upon the usage of intercultural communication as a component language teaching program. In another study conducted by Jia (2015) in China, he explored the role that national culture plays in foreign language teaching programs. The results of his study showed that a completely novel and progressive depiction of China is being portrayed globally as a result of cultural globalization in China. Similarly, Mehran, Sotudenama and Marandi (2016) studied the Iranian students' attitude towards inclusion of intercultural communication in English language teaching. The results of their study showed that inclusion of intercultural communication in language teaching program was largely appreciated by the respondents.

Using the scaffolding technique for teaching writing, Bryan and Christianson (2008) facilitated their students through the concept of classroom community. Bryan and Christianson (2008) assert that scaffolding and the concept of community is consistent with each other as individual use collaboration and assistance to learn with and from each other. The findings of their study were positive that suggested that scaffolding technique is useful in transforming students into

autonomous learners. The findings of the study conducted by Vacca (2008) also validate the effectiveness of scaffolding technique. He proposed that teachers should have detailed interaction with learners in facilitating them with the reading skills and then they should encourage the learners to participate in small group interaction. This mode of instruction propels the notion of scaffolding as presented in other researches that suggest that learning process should move teacher centered interaction to student centered interaction. Vacca's (2008) findings also suggest that scaffolding technique is useful in transforming students into autonomous learners.

For students, who are studying in an ENL context, intercultural learning helps also improve English learning because all the interactions take place in the target language that is English. Students find themselves surrounded with the target language throughout their stay in the ENL context. However, when EFL students study in an ESL context, the target language, English, and the intercultural language of the people and their teachers from the ESL context are different. These EFL students find themselves deprived of the opportunity to be surrounded with the target language because the intercultural language used in their daily discourse is different. Therefore, this study targets EFL learners coming from Iraq and studying in Pakistan, which offers an ESL context, with an aim of investigating how scaffolding technique impacts upon the writing skills of foreign language learners of English in an English as a second language intercultural communication context. Whereas, Widdowson (2005) asserts that typical English texts included in English language textbooks deprives students of their participation in the activities conducted in classrooms because these present cultural images that are untrue and are contrary to reality, therefore these should also be strictly discouraged.

Research design

This study employs a quasi-experimental research design which allows the researcher to compare the improvement in the EFL learners' English writing skills using a pre-test and post-test having introduced scaffolding technique intervention after the pre-test.

Research Site and Participants:

This study was conducted on twenty-nine Iraqi professionals who spoke Arabic as first language and worked for a company in oil and gas sector. The level of English proficiency of the participants was Elementary. They were being trained for a customized English language and communication skills course which was one month long, a total of two hundred and forty hours. It was conducted at Movenpick, a five-star hotel, in Karachi which offers Wi-Fi internet connections, controlled air conditioning and many other facilities.

Research Instrument:

This study was conducted using a quantitative research approach. According to Creswell (1994), numerical data is collected and analyzed with the help of mathematically based methods in a

quantitative approach. Single group pretest-posttest quasi experimental design was adopted to compare students' writing skills performance in a pretest and posttest. The scoring system employed was based on Heaton (1988) in which the aspects assessed involving grammar, vocabulary, mechanism, and content. The researchers developed rubrics for the assessment of the writing skills of the research participants.

Analysis and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest Score	29	3.00	19.00	9.6897	3.80886
Posttest Score	29	10.00	20.00	16.0000	2.25198
Valid N (listwise)	29				

The data was analyzed to retrieve descriptive statistics for the interpretation of the results. The analysis of the data shows that the minimum pretest score of the participants is 3.00 whereas the maximum score in the pretest by the participants is 19.00. Similarly, the mean score of the pretest is 9.75. On the other hand, the standard deviation of the pretest scores is 3.8.

In comparison to the pretest scores analysis, the posttest scores' analysis are quite different. The minimum posttest score is 10.00, whereas, the maximum posttest score is 20.00. Similarly, the mean posttest score according to the descriptive analysis is 16.00, while, the standard deviation in the posttest scores is 2.25.

It is quite evident from the analysis of the data that the intervention done through scaffolding technique for teaching writing skills to language learners had a positive impact on the students. The scores of pre-test and post-test are much noticeably different from each other. The posttest scores are significantly higher than pretest scores. Other than that the difference in the mean scores are quite evident about effectiveness of the scaffolding techniques used to teach writing skills in language learning classrooms. The difference in standard deviation of scores from the mean scores is also evident that the intervention was successful in terms of teaching writing skills through scaffolding technique. The difference between the standard deviation also shows that the groups performed more consistently in the post-test (assessment done after intervention) than in the pre-test (assessment done before intervention).

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Posttest Score - Pretest Score	6.31034	3.44449	.63963	5.00013	7.62056	9.866	28	.000

Significant value is 0.00, which is less than .05 it shows that alternate hypothesis is accepted and null hypothesis is rejected. Upper and lower values of confidence interval are positive and there is no zero between them so it also shows that alternate hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected. The value of standard error mean also points out the fact that the sample present in the study has the tendency of being representative of the population. Hence, it can be said that the data collected from the participants can be taken and generalized on the population in general.

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Posttest Score	16.0000	29	2.25198	.41818
Pretest Score	9.6897	29	3.80886	.70729

The post-test scores are statistically significantly higher than the pre-test scores at the 5% level of significance. As indicated by the paired sample t-test, on average, the post-test scores of the participants are 6.3 units (mention the unit here) higher than the pre-test scores. Indicating that the post-test scores (or mention the object of whatever the phenomenon was under study) of participants significantly improved over the course of training.

The result of the study clearly indicate that implementing scaffolding techniques in language learning and teaching classrooms has significant impact on the writing skills of language learners of English in an English as a second language class in intercultural communication context. It further indicates that in the single group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental research design used in this study, the writing achievement of the twenty-nine Iraqi students increased after the intervention of scaffolding technique in the posttest compared to the pretest. Various studies (Katilie, 2003; Solikhah, 2012; Vereappan, et.al. 2011; Yangrifqi, 2012) conducted on implementing scaffolding techniques in English language learning classrooms have concluded that this technique has improved learners' writing skills in language learning classroom in intercultural communication context. The results of this study also concluded that scaffolding technique proves to be efficient as a tool of instruction for improving students' writing skills. This conclusion is also supported by another study Katalie (2003) conducted on improving students' descriptive writing skills. The study concluded that scaffolding strategy proves to be effective as an instruction to

enable students upgrade their descriptive writing skills. From the analysis of the data it can also be understood that scaffolding technique helps mitigating the problems of the students that they face while studying a writing course. Ningrum (2007) undertook a study and used scaffolding strategy as a writing process to resolve the issue that students face in the learning of expository writing skills and this research also concluded that scaffolding technique does help minimizing the problems of students that they face while learning to write academic write ups. The findings of the study also revealed that the use of scaffolding technique not only enhanced the motivation of learners while the scaffolding technique was implemented but also improved the final writing product of the learners.

Conclusions

In this study, the impact of scaffolding approach on the writing skills of foreign language learners of English in an English as a second language intercultural communication context has been studied. The study addressed the question of how scaffolding technique impacts upon the writing skills of foreign language learners of English in an English as a second language intercultural communication context. The study indicates that the group being studied in this single group pretest-posttest quasi experimental research design achieved a mean score of (9.6897) in the pretest, while after the implementation of the intervention of scaffolding technique, the same group achieved a mean score (16.0000). To conclude, the results from the statistical analysis indicated significant improvement in the writing skills of the foreign language learners of English studying in an English as a second language intercultural communication context. This establishes that the intervention of scaffolding technique used for the teaching of writing in this study provides a better basis for enhancing their writing skills. In order to use scaffolding technique successfully, it is important that teacher provide learners with the optimum assistance that might be required for the completion of the task, and then gradually reduce the level of support until learners become skilled in completing the task independently.

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