

The Relationship between Language Learning Strategies and Teacher's Mediating Role

SORAYYA BEHROOZIZAD

*School of Language Studies and Linguistics
FSSK, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Malaysia
sorayyabehroozi@yahoo.com*

RADHA M.K NAMBIAR

*School of Language Studies and Linguistics
FSSK, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Malaysia*

ZAINI AMIR

*School of Language Studies and Linguistics
FSSK, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

Research on second and foreign language learning strategies has mushroomed over the last three decades and some very valuable studies have been conducted. Most, however examine strategies from a cognitive perspective, with fewer studies examining the emergence of learning strategies from a sociocultural perspective. In particular, the role of sociocultural mediation has not been specifically investigated as a solution for (English as a Foreign Language) EFL learners' difficulties by Iranian researchers. This study investigates the role of mediation in Iranian EFL learners' strategy development and use by reconfiguring the culture of the EFL listening-speaking classroom through teacher's scaffolding techniques. Framed by sociocultural theory and activity theory the study collects data using the learner-diary, observation field notes and student and teacher interviews. The findings indicated that the participants' activities are mediated to a considerable extent by the opportunities provided through the teacher's scaffolding. The findings suggest that teachers should utilize different forms of mediation in their teaching to help learners harness the advantage of the efficacy of communicative classrooms.

Keywords: EFL learning; listening speaking; mediation; scaffolding; sociocultural theory

INTRODUCTION

The majority of Iranian language classes as Hosseini (2007: 2) maintains “are mostly run through a hybrid of grammar-translation method and audio-lingual methods, entails translation, repetition, memorization, recitation, and reproduction”. In such classes, as is the case with most traditional classrooms, there is very little interaction between the teacher and students and also among students and oral skills particularly listening have not been emphasized as the dominant skill of communication. It often appears as if interaction is not pivotal to the teaching and learning process (Riazi & Razmjoo 2006, Ghorbani 2011). As such, learners lose the opportunity to accomplish tasks with knowledge they construct in the process of collaboration and interaction with peers (Klingner & Vaughn 2000, Mercer 2000, Swain 2001).

Gomez, Curwood and Hassett (2010:20) highlight the traditional classrooms as a source of problem for the EFL learners and state, "... with an emphasis on taking standardised tests, the learning environment is designed on the view that learning is a transaction that happens solely 'inside the head'. Unfortunately, this pushes many students to the margins of classroom engagement and participation". The traditional classroom culture does not provide the learners with the opportunity to generate and develop language learning strategies in the process of communicating in English. This is because the students have very limited opportunity to talk about their learning processes and experiences making them highly passive and dependent on the teacher. Little room is left for the use of communicative functions of the L2, especially important in classrooms where students learn the L2 as a foreign language and have very restricted contact with the target language outside of classroom (Duff & Polio 1990, Polio & Duff 1994).

This situation calls for a shift in classroom culture from a teacher-directed or product-based approach to a more interaction-based or process-based pedagogy suitable for the Iranian EFL students to find the possibility of developing learning strategies (Eslami-Rasekh & Valizadeh 2004, Hosseini 2007). Clearly, in this process-based approach the accommodation of the learners' needs would be the major target in learning.

A review of language learning strategy research demonstrates that to date most language learning strategy (LLS) research have been carried out under the umbrella of cognitive psychology theories (Wenden 1987, O'Malley & Chamot 1990, Oxford 1993, 2003, Cohen, 1998). However, as Gao (2010) discusses, the theoretical basis of learning has recently been diversified by turning to the sociocultural context of language learning. The challenging claim by the researchers (Donato & McCormic 1994, Gao 2010) is that context or society is as significant as the individual learners' minds, in the process of learning. As such, the emphasis on the learner changed from learner centered to "learner-in-the-context" (Gao 2010:16).

This shift opened the gate for sociocultural perspectives to be incorporated into LLS research as a way of helping overcome EFL learners' difficulties (Lantolf 2000, Lantolf & Poehner 2008). This suggests developing language learning strategies in social communities where novice individuals are invited by more experienced participants (whether teacher or peers) to participate in socioculturally-based practices in the classroom (Donato & McCormic 1994, Gao 2010). In so doing, the sociocultural theory contributes to the development process by promoting a learning context in which the social process, interactions and the use of signs and tools as vehicles for constructing knowledge are emphasized. In such a context, construction of meaning is mediated by the teacher as a scaffolder and a facilitator in the process of learning. Thus, there will be a reciprocal relationship between students and teacher in learning process and learners' communication abilities are enhanced through the development of language learning strategies.

MEDIATION AND SCAFFOLDING

Lantolf (2000:80) posits that "higher forms of human mental activity are mediated" and this is the basis of socio-cultural theory (SCT). Humans develop relationships with the world through direct stimulus-response reflexes and their ability to use physical tools to make indirect connections or mediate their relationship. In doing so they can regulate and control their behaviors via psychological and technical tools or artifacts (Vygotsky 1978). With this in mind, language learners can control and regulate their learning processes through

mediating tools such as teacher's scaffolding techniques. Lantolf (2000) presents three versions of mediation: mediation by others, mediation by self through private speech, and mediation by artifacts, e.g. tasks and technology. This paper views mediation by others as the domain of the teacher of the EFL classroom and therefore focuses on the instruction and scaffolding techniques of the teacher.

Within the scope of learning, the term scaffolding is defined as "the temporary support provided for the completion of a task that learners otherwise might not be able to complete" (Pol, Volman & Beishuizen 2010, p. 1-2). In the process of student-teacher interaction the only active participant is not the teacher, but within the scaffolding process, which is a dynamic reciprocal process, the learner is a kind of active participant as well. Both teacher and learner construct a shared understanding by means of communicative exchanges in which the student as a novice learns from the teacher as a more expert other. So, in the process of doing tasks, both teacher and learner enjoy a shared problem-solving experience in collaboration and interaction with each other.

Vygotsky claims the teacher is the person who is able to recognize learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978: 86) defines ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". Under the assistance of experienced and supportive adults, the learners are able to do a task which are unable to accomplish when they are not provided with that guidance, that is "what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (Vygotsky 1978, p. 87). This is possible through interaction. Clearly, this interaction takes place between a novice (in the case of this study, an EFL learner) and an expert (teacher) in a social situation.

Gibbons (2003) investigated the effect of teacher-student talk on learners' language development in a science classroom. In this study, two teachers mediated between the learners' current level of linguistic knowledge and the general understandings of science along with specialist understandings of science. The teachers' mediation took place through their interaction with the students. The findings indicated that both teachers and learners were active constructors of knowledge in terms of L2 development.

Drawing on Sociocultural theory, Walqui (2006) presented a model of instructional scaffolding in which the social nature of learning and interactive nature of support were emphasized. In an attempt to enhance linguistic and academic development, Walqui (2006:169) examined the use of scaffolding as both structure and process. To clarify, the model included both "planned curriculum planning progression over time (e.g. a series of tasks over time...) and the procedures used in a particular activity together with the collaborative process of interaction" (Walqui 2006, p. 169). Clearly, the flow of sequence was from macro to micro or from planned progression to a moment-to-moment scaffolding. Walqui concludes that academic instructional scaffolding can convert the English language learners' traditional model into an interactive curriculum. The point which was highly emphasized by Walqui was using scaffolding based on students' needs.

Pol et.al (2010) studied scaffolding in teacher-student interaction in terms of appearances and taxonomy of scaffolding strategies. They examined the effectiveness of scaffolding by gathering articles from three data bases, Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Educational Resources Information Centre and Psyc INFO to probe the domain of scaffolding, measurements, the means and goals. Among the articles they searched, 27 were theoretical, 26 descriptive, eight focused on effectiveness, four on 'editorial introductions of thematic issues', and one of them was on 'meta analytical'. Based on the information

obtained from articles, the authors concluded that the majority of empirical studies are small-scaled, descriptive studies some of which include intervention. Most of these studies emphasize literacy, mathematics and science. One-to-one interactions do not receive much attention and only a few studies investigate the effectiveness of scaffolding.

This study explores how mediation can help in reconfiguring the Iranian EFL classroom to a socio-cultural setting. Specifically the study proposes to investigate the mediating role of the teacher in the development of learning strategies in a listening-speaking classroom. The study is guided by the following research question: “What is the role of teacher’s scaffolding in learners’ strategy development in listening-speaking classroom?”

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in an undergraduate EFL listening-speaking classroom in the English Language Department, Azad University, Iran. The listening-speaking course is one of the courses that students reading for a bachelor degree in English have to complete. The basic goal of this course is to provide the students with the opportunity to improve their communication skills. The course consists of four levels: listening-speaking one, two, three, and four offered over four consecutive semesters. Each level of the course was conducted over 15 sessions with each session lasting 90 minutes or 1 1/2 hours. Practice in this classroom consists of two parts: listening activities and speaking activities. In practicing listening, the students sat in their carrels to benefit from the best audio quality, but when doing activities related to speaking, both the teacher and the students preferred to sit in a circle for activities like group discussions.

PARTICIPANTS

Purposive sampling (Dornyei 2007) was used to select the sample for the study focusing on four criteria: ELT majors, third semester or intermediate level students registered for the Listening-Speaking course, passed Levels 1 and 2 of the course, and scored 17 out of 20 in the final exam of Level 2. Six second year Iranian students (R1 – R6) from both genders (sophomores) were selected for the study and they ranged in ages from 21 to 24 years.

INSTRUMENTS

This study utilized multiple sources of data from focus-group and group interviews of the learners, interview with the teacher, observation field notes and learner diary. The students were also set listening and speaking tasks which required them to spend time inside and outside the classroom to work with their partners and also in groups. The listening tasks consist of guessing the listening content or identity of something, formulating questions, comprehending and other related tasks. In speaking tasks, the participants were required to discuss, narrate a story or an event, describe a place or someone, play roles and some other similar tasks.

FOCUS-GROUP, GROUP INTERVIEW AND TEACHER INTERVIEW

On the basis of researcher’s prior teaching experiences in the site of the present research and in the light of the teacher’s explanations about the students’ characteristics, two focus-group

interviews and a group interview with the students were conducted to capture students' perceptions of mediating factors. An interview was also conducted with the teacher about her teaching philosophy in order to gain an in-depth understanding on the teacher's role as a mediator. In this interview which lasted for about 20 minutes, the teacher of the listening-speaking classroom was asked to provide some information concerning her teaching, common listening-speaking practices, and different ways of providing feedback.

OBSERVATION FIELD NOTES

The class was observed three times a week by the researcher who functioned as a non-participant observer. No observational scheme was used in the process of observing as some experts believe that observational schemes, though effective in some studies, hinder the capturing of the interaction-based activities in the context. Thus to gauge how mediating agent affects the students' activities and strategy development, the researcher took informal field notes emphasizing the most central categories comprising:

1. Teacher's activities including her scaffolding techniques (focusing on the mediating role of the teacher)
2. Students' activities (focusing on their goal-directed actions)
3. Interactions between the teacher and the students and among the students

LEARNER DIARY

The learner-diary consisted of three parts: speaking tasks, listening tasks and evaluation tasks. Each part consisted function and task titles, problems, solutions and a section entitled 'any general learning experience of the learner'. To address the problem of forgetfulness, the students were asked to take notes concerning their problems in learning the tasks as well as the solutions they provide for each problem at the end of every session. It should also be mentioned that diary writing was made compulsory in the listening-speaking course by the teacher, to ensure students completed the diaries. The participants agreed to use English in their diary entries however they were allowed to enter any word, phrase or sentence in their native language (Persian) when necessary. The participants were required to submit two sets of diary entries, one at the end of session 15 (midway through semester) and the second at the end of the semester.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) was used to analyze the data obtained from the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) propose a six phase approach to thematic analysis as shown in Table 1 below.

The analysis of the interviews focused on the role of the teacher as a mediator in the classroom. The interviews were transcribed and the transcripts read and re-read many times to identify teacher's roles in the classroom. Then in the next phase the data identified was then put into meaningful groups or codes based on what could be possible teacher roles and this process was both data and theory driven. The roles were based on what the data revealed and what the literature says about teachers' roles (Tharp & Gallimore 1988). Tharp and Gallimore (1988) identified six roles of teachers (feeding back, giving hints, instructing, explaining, modeling and questioning) in providing scaffolding and these were used to help

code the data. In phase three the codes were analysed and combined to form themes. Phase four involved reviewing and refining the themes identified to develop a satisfactory thematic map to use for the study (Figure 1). In the next phase the themes were defined and further refined to ensure each identified theme is able to capture and analyse the data. The final phase enabled a detailed analysis to be worked out including examples from the data itself.

TABLE 1. Phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006)

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas about teacher's role.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Observation field notes comprising 30 sessions of listening-speaking instruction were analyzed using Tharp and Gallimore's (1990) model for analyzing scaffolding.

- a) Feeding back: providing positive or negative information on students' performance
- b) Giving of hints: providing suggestions in learning process
- c) Instructing: providing the student with explicit information on how to do something must be done
- d) Explaining: providing more detailed clarification
- e) Modeling: offering a typical behavior for imitation
- f) Questioning: asking questions for activating students' thinking

Drawing on this model, the researcher tried to get a grip on how the teacher's scaffolding techniques mediated the students' strategy development. Categories were generated through the content analysis of the field notes. In the pre-coding phase, all the observation field notes were read repetitively to obtain a general understanding and search for the instances and incidents of scaffolding techniques that might mediate students' strategy development. Then the researcher labeled or coded the scaffolding techniques

which were then sorted into the six means above. In finalizing the analysis, the strategies mediated by each kind of means were elicited from the diary entries and identified.

The learner diaries were analyzed through the content analysis using Leontiev’s (1981) activity theory to analyze the learners’ developing actions or strategies under the teacher’s scaffolding. The diaries were read several times and the participant’s immediate goal of employing a specific strategy was extracted from the problems reported in the entry. Then the action reported in the solutions to the problems was elicited. Finally, the action was labeled based on the kind of mediator (six scaffolding means) identified in the model adopted from Tharp and Gallimore (1988).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data revealed that six categories as illustrated in Figure 1: 5 feedback-mediated strategies, 11 instruction-mediated strategies, 6 modeling-mediated strategies, 9 hint-mediated strategies, 3 question-mediated strategies, and 5 explanation-mediated strategies emerged as a result of the teacher’s mediating role. All the six participants traced the origin of their tendency and interest in improving listening and speaking skills back to their teacher’s new method of teaching which was indeed different from what they had already experienced. The participants generally presented affirmative responses to the role of the teacher in providing opportunities to develop a variety of learning strategies in accordance with their goals. The discussion will focus on the strategies that emerged, as evinced from the interviews, observations and students’ diaries and link them to the teacher’s mediating strategies.

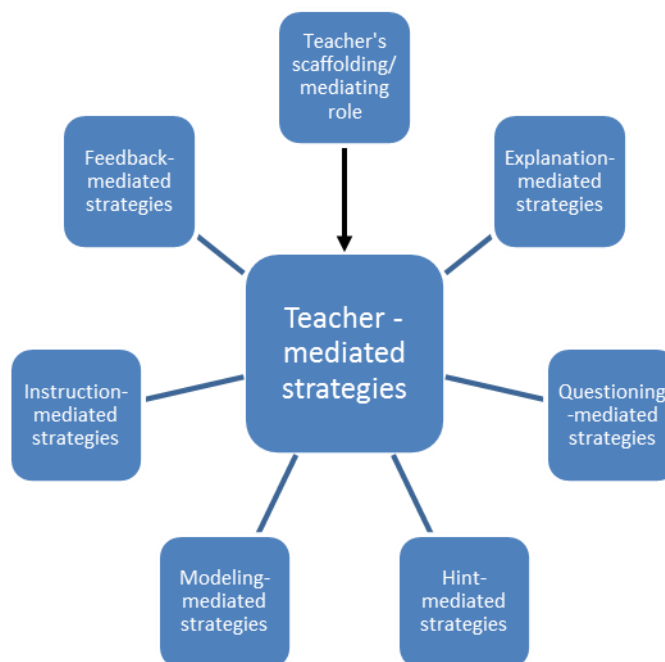


FIGURE 1. The classification of the strategies emerged in the light of teacher’s mediation

FEEDBACK-MEDIATED STRATEGIES

The teacher provided effective feedback on her students' learning processes and outcomes. R1 stated how the teacher's comment shed light on his knowledge concerning description. *"The teacher corrected my errors by telling the right form of them, I took note about them and when I got home I started to describe my room to review what the teacher had told me"* (the first diary). R2 reported that the impact of the teacher's feedback on her peers' task performance contributed directly to the development of her listening-speaking abilities. The teacher's encouraging feedback further encouraged R3 and she states in the group interview, *"dear teacher thanks for making us what we are today"*. R3 maintained, as the teacher pointed out the merits and demerits of her assignments such as presentation, she practiced it in front of mirror to keep her natural gesture while presenting or doing the role-plays. In general, the teacher's feedback built a bridge between the participants and their self-confidence and the use of different strategies in carrying out the listening-speaking tasks (Table 2).

TABLE 2. Feedback-mediated strategies

-
- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Taking note of the teacher's comments and using them in other similar situations 2. Practicing pronunciation of the words prior to every presentation 3. Speaking in front of mirror to keep natural gesture 4. Practicing the speaking tasks before class 5. Speaking with self-confidence without being disturbed by grammatical errors |
|--|
-

INSTRUCTION-MEDIATED STRATEGIES

Instructing was a predominant strategy reported by the participants and observed by the researcher as illustrated in Table 3. Compared with the participants' previous listening-speaking course teacher, the teacher's instruction was generally more interaction-based, focusing on doing a variety of the listening-speaking tasks. In the second focus-group interview almost all of the participants reported that the effect of the teacher's new teaching techniques on their motivation and inclination to improve their listening-speaking abilities was very significant and it helped enhance their ability to use the English language. For example, when R4 encountered some problems in understanding the listening text from Voice of America (VOA) because of the American pronunciation the teacher guided her on how to tackle such a problem. *"The teacher pronounced some key words with British and American accents and I understood it...when my teacher corrected my pronunciation, I understand I should be sensitive. This helped me much"* (first diary). So, R4 learnt that a key to understanding VOA texts is to look for the American pronunciation of the words. R4 explained that the teacher's instruction taught her a new strategy which was to watch an English movie first without subtitles and then with subtitles to enhance understanding and gain deeper insights into the real world of the English language.

Drawing on the teacher's instruction, the participants expanded their vocabulary by developing and using interesting strategies. For instance, to assist the students to learn the meaning of the new words related to 'personality traits', the teacher used painting of the words as a tool. A vital contribution which extended the students' speaking ability was the teacher's instruction on organizing a whole-class discussion and using the newly-learned words. Her instruction provided the students with the opportunity to construct and develop

four types of the listening skills: guessing and predicting the intended content with pre-listening tasks; finding the proper names and the dates prior to listening to avoid any understanding intrusion; focusing on finding answers to Wh-questions; and discussing the listening text with peers after listening

TABLE 3. Instruction-mediated strategies

-
1. Practicing the American English to distinguish the words in VOA listening passages
 2. Watching the documentaries without subtitle first and then with subtitle
 3. Understanding English songs through sharing ideas
 4. Guessing the content of the listening text before listening
 5. Understanding the meaning of the new words through painting
 6. Remembering the antonym of the new word to learn it
 7. Using the newly-learned words in a whole-class discussion
 8. Discussing the content of every movie after watching
 9. Listening consciously to get a specific piece of information
 10. Finding the dates and proper names while listening
 11. Finding answers to wh-questions first
-

MODELING-MEDIATED STRATEGIES

The participants pointed out the prominent role that the teacher's modeling played in their speaking fluency, giving good presentations and to some extent vocabulary expansion (Table 4). A significant modeling contribution took place when the teacher felt that the students were puzzled by some description-based assignments. As such, she provided an example or a sample for more elaboration on the topic by comparing and contrasted her hometown with her colleague who was born in a different state prior to the students' descriptions. The participants reported that they could expand their vocabulary knowledge with the teacher's help. For instance, R3 stated that '*Rhythm and blue*' in music didn't make sense to her. The teacher made and repeated sounds like 'tap tap' trying to compare them to the style used in '*Rhythm and blue*' music. Then in an attempt to help the students remember the words related to music, the teacher wrote the words together with some other unrelated words on the board and asked them to cross out the irrelevant words. This technique assisted R3 to learn and remember the music words. Finally, she was able to use the words in a paragraph of her own to learn them coherently.

TABLE 4. Modeling-mediated strategies

-
1. Imitating the teacher's native-like pronunciation in speaking
 2. Doing the task by getting hint from the teacher's sample description
 3. Improving speaking through face-to-face description
 4. Giving good presentations by following the teacher's model
 5. Learning to speak by referring to the advantages and disadvantages of others' speech
 6. Making flash cards of one's common errors
-

HINT-MEDIATED STRATEGIES

It was found that the students' listening-speaking abilities along with their knowledge on vocabulary and grammar were enriched by the teacher's teaching suggestions. One of the tasks for the students to do was to make Wh- questions on general facts. By assigning this

task the teacher intended to prepare her students for both group discussions and listening comprehension and interpretation. R3, for example, stated that she was guided by her hints in finding general facts from online magazines and newspapers. R3 reported that when she and her partner searched the web they were able to come up with interesting Wh-questions using information they found online. They were able to extend the teacher’s suggestion of using online sources to identify facts they could use to create questions.

Sharing ideas and exchanging the written assignments were the teacher’s other practical hints which basically influenced the students’ learning and strategy use. The teacher’s suggestions shed light on the vocabulary knowledge of the students. Most of the students expressed that using flash cards, photo dictionary, and reading different fictions played a very prominent role in fostering their vocabulary knowledge (Table 5).

TABLE 5. Hint-mediated strategies

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Finding general facts from online magazines to provide wh-questions 2. Exchanging the written assignments to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the assignment 3. Sharing ideas to identify and solve the grammatical and lexical problems 4. Watching video films to get information about the famous cities of the world 5. Listening carefully to get the gist of the listening instead of taking notes in the first time listening 6. Practicing speaking in front of mirror to communicate with girl partner 7. Finding real-life situations in academic websites 8. Using photo dictionary to expand vocabulary 9. Reading fictions to improve vocabulary knowledge
--

QUESTIONING-MEDIATED STRATEGIES

The students’ reported fewer questioning mediated strategies compared to the other identified strategies (Table 6). However, the influence of the teacher’s questioning was evident when she involved all the students in pre-listening and speaking activities by asking questions with the aim of activating their background knowledge about the topic. These questions helped create interaction and communication among the students as they took advantage of the information. In addition, the teacher asked some leading questions when her students encountered learning problems. For instance, R2 reported that she has learned from her teacher to pay attention to the relationship between words and the deep structure of the sentences.

TABLE 6. Questioning-mediated strategies

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Paying attention to the relationship between words and the deep structure of sentences 2. Answering the teacher’s wh-questions to facilitate the process of understanding 3. Using background knowledge while listening
--

EXPLANATION-MEDIATED STRATEGIES

The teacher’s explanation while not so common affected the students’ learning in different ways (Table 7). Based on my field notes, she used explanation whenever the task was too

content specific, scientific or complex and she knew the students did not have the background knowledge to comprehend the task. For instance, she explained the term ‘DNA’ which was the topic of a listening passage prepared as an evaluation task. Her explanation helped R2 to get the central idea of the text. The teacher’s explanation also provided useful information for R4 who had no background about the scientific texts helping her to answer the WH-questions. Similarly, when the students had to carry out a comparative task on American and Iranian educational grades, the teacher explained the classification of the educational grades of American schools to the students.

R5, who was interested in giving mini lectures, was criticized by the teacher for producing sentences which were short and in this way separating ideas from each other. The teacher’s explanations about the role of transition words in the comprehensibility of both oral and written speech helped R5 study and use them in actual speech. Interestingly, the explanation on the use of transition words became a good criterion for R6 to distinguish the similarities and differences. For example, in the first diary entry R6 put ‘on the contrary’ at the beginning of sentences without including the contrasted information. However after the teacher’s explanation, R6 was able to use transition words properly. Finally, the teacher’s procedural explanation mediated between the students and their attempt to conduct a group interview, one of the speaking tasks. Since it was their first experience of performing such a task, the respondents encountered problems in giving coherence and organization to the interview. The teacher explained the different procedures required for an effective interview and in this way facilitated their ability to learn how to conduct interviews with her scaffolding.

TABLE 7. Explanation-mediated strategies

-
- | | |
|----|---|
| 1. | Understanding the central idea of the scientific texts through the teacher’s explanations |
| 2. | Doing a comparative task (American schools versus Iranian schools) through the teacher’s explanations |
| 3. | Using transition words to distinguish the similarities and differences |
| 4. | Using transition words in actual speech to make it comprehensible |
| 5. | Using the teacher’s procedural explanations to conduct an interview |
-

The EFL teacher mediated the students’ strategy development and use through six means as shown in Figure 1. Instruction mediated strategies were very common and 11 such strategies were employed by students to solve listening comprehension problems, understand English documentaries and songs, guess the content of the listening passages, expand vocabulary range and express themselves in a face-to-face activity. The teacher’s mediation provided the students with the opportunity to develop six strategies concerning pronunciation improvement, giving good presentations, enhancing vocabulary knowledge, and improving describing skills.

Through getting some hints and suggestions from the teacher, the EFL learners could develop nine interesting strategies regarding making wh-questions, reducing their stress by comparing their assignment with their peers and obtaining useful information about other countries required for task completion activities. Respectively, the EFL teacher’s feeding back scaffolding shed light on the development of the students’ listening and speaking abilities through pointing to their weak and strong features of performance and encouraging pair-work and group-work. Thus, her feeding back mediated the use and development of five strategies to enhance the performance of the tasks. In a similar vein, the findings revealed that the teacher’s explaining means contributed to the development of five related

strategies and facilitated the process of interaction among peers. The interaction built could in turn pave the way for developing a series of the listening and speaking strategies.

Based on the findings, it can be interpreted that the teacher of the listening-speaking course tried to encourage and strengthen the interaction in listening-speaking tasks and activities to develop the learners' mental processes. This is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) claim that the teacher is a person who can recognize learners' zone of proximal development. It was obvious that in the process of performing the tasks, both the teacher and the learners enjoyed and benefited from a shared problem-solving experience. This experience was the outcome of the collaboration and interaction as part of the reconfigured classroom culture constructed by the teacher. Of interest was the teacher's ability in moving the learners from the lower level to the higher level under her guidance and the interaction of the learners with the cognizant peers.

In conceptualizing the teacher's scaffolding from the Vygotskian perspective, we observed that the EFL learners' learning first occurred on the interpersonal domain through pair-work, group-work, whole-class activities and interaction and then on the intrapersonal domain. This was evident when the learner was able to develop some strategies in accordance with the goals set prior to task performance.

The findings on the teacher's scaffolding techniques are in line with Walqui's (2006) instructional scaffolding types. The scaffolding types included modeling, bridging, contextualization, building schema, re-presenting text and developing metacognition as different types of the instructional scaffolding. The findings of our study revealed that the teacher provided ample modeling to help the students to perform different tasks successfully. In terms of bridging, the teacher tried to activate the students' background knowledge by asking questions and encouraging them to discuss the topic before listening to the text. Similar to Walqui's contextualization, the teacher created a clear image of the issue under the discussion or practice through painting or drawing a concept map. Above all, in line with Walqui's developing metacognition, we observed that the teacher of the listening-speaking classroom omitted any formal final exam and attempted to promote the culture of self-evaluation. Her effort is evident in making the students to keep diaries in which they could identify their problems in doing the tasks, explore suitable solutions, apply learned strategies, and monitor and evaluate their learning.

Similarly, the findings correspond to Gibbon's (2003) findings in which both teachers and learners were active in knowledge construction. In line with this finding, both Iranian EFL learners and teacher enjoyed a shared problem-solving experience.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Drawing on sociocultural theory the paper explored the role of mediation in the Iranian EFL learners' strategy development and use in the listening-speaking classroom. The results revealed that teacher's scaffolding mediated the EFL learners' strategy development by reorganizing the classroom culture. The teacher succeeded in creating a sociocultural setting in the classroom and helped encourage active participation in all class activities. By introducing communicative language tasks there was better interaction in the classroom among peers and between the teachers and learners. Encouraging learners to keep diaries was a good method to get the learners to self-reflect and assess their learning experiences.

It was also found that the learners could self-assess by writing their learning experiences in their diary entries and exploring appropriate solutions through sharing their

ideas with the peers. Another important finding was that the teacher's scaffolding facilitated the learners' learning procedure, in general and aided in the improvement of different abilities, in particular. Being stimulated by the opportunities provided by the teacher and with heightened self-confidence, the EFL learners could successfully develop a variety of strategies to improve their knowledge in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, listening comprehension and speaking.

The study contributes to the body of literature on LLSs by indicating that teacher's mediating role within a socioculturally-organized learning context would result in the development of different language learning strategies. However, similar to any other research, the findings are influenced by a number of limitations. Thus, further studies are required to incorporate different classrooms to collect the necessary data from. Moreover, future investigations should also explore the presence of other mediators in classroom discourse.

REFERENCES

- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2),77-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cohen, A. D. (1998). *Strategies in learning and using a second language*. Essex, UK: Longman.
- Donato, R. and D. McCormick. (1994). A sociocultural perspective on language learning strategies: The role of mediation. *Modern Language Journal* 78, 453–64. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1994.tb02063.x>
- Dornyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Duff, P.A. and C.G. Polio. (1990). How much foreign language is there in the foreign language classroom? *Modern Language Journal* 74 (2), 154-166 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1990.tb02561.x>
- Eslami-Rasekh, Z. and Valizadeh, K. (2004). Classroom activities viewed from different perspectives: Learners' voice vs. teachers' voice. *TESL EJ*, 8 (3),1-13
- Ghorbani, M.R. (2011). The impact of phonetic instruction on Iranian students' listening abilities enhancement. *Asian EFL Journal*, 52, 24-34
- Gao, X. (2006). Understanding changes in Chinese students' uses of learning strategies in China and Britain: A socio-cultural re-interpretation, *System* 34, 55–67.
- Gao, X. (2010). *Strategic language learning: The roles of agency and context*. Bristol,: Multilingual Matters.
- Gibbon, P. (2003). Mediating language learning: Teacher interactions with ESL students in a content-based classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37, (2), 247-274. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3588504>
- Gomez, M. L., Curwood, J.S., Hassett, D. (2010). Technology, learning and instruction: Distributed cognition in the secondary English classroom. *Literacy*, 44 (1) 20-27 22 MAR 2010 DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-4369.2010.00541.x
- Hosseini, S. M. H. (2007). ELT in higher education in Iran and India: critical view. *Language in India*, 7, 1-11. Retrieved January 16, 2012 from <http://www.languageinindia.com/dec2007/eltinindiaandiran.pdf>
- Klingner, J. & Vaughn, S. (2000). The helping behaviors of fifth graders while using collaborative strategic reading during ESL context classes. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34, 69-98
- Lantolf, P. J. (2000). *Socio-cultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lantolf, J. P. & M. E. Poehner (2008). *Sociocultural theory and the teaching of second Languages*. London: Equinox Press.
- Leont'ev, A.N. (1972/1981). *The concept of activity in psychology*. In Wertsch, J.V. (ed.), *The Concept of Activity in Soviet Psychology*, Armonk, NY: M.E.Sharpe.
- Mercer, N. (2000). *Words and minds*. London: Routledge.
- Murray, D. E. and Mc Pherson, P. (2006). Scaffolding Instruction for feeding the Web. *Language Teaching Research* 10,(2), 131–156 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1362168806lr189oa>
- O'Malley, J. D. & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Parks, S. and P. M. Raymond. (2004). Strategy use by non-native English speaking students in an MBA program: Not business as usual. *Modern Language Journal* 88: 374–89. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.0026-7902.2004.00235.x>
- Pol, J.V.D & Volman, M. & Beishuizen, J. (2010). Scaffolding in teacher–student interaction: A decade of research. *Educational Psychology Review*. DOI 10.1007/s10648-010-9127-6
- Polio, C.G. and Duff, P. A. (1994). Teachers’ language use in university foreign language classroom: A quantitative analysis of English and target language alternation. *Modern Language Journal*, 78 (3), 313-326. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1994.tb02045.x>
- Razmjo, S. A. & Riazi, M. (2006). Is communicative language teaching practical in the expanding circle? A case study of teachers of Shiraz high-schools and institutes. *Journal of Language and Learning*, 4 (2), 144-171.
- Smidt, S. (2009). *Introducing Vygotsky*. New York: Routledge
- Swain, M. (2001). Examining dialogue: Another approach to context specification and validity inferences drawn from test scores. *Language Testing*, 18(3), 275-302
- Tharp, R. and Gallimore, R. (1990). *Teaching mind in society: Teaching, schooling and literate discourse*. In L.Moll (Ed.). *Vygotsky and Education: Instructional implications and applications of soci-historical psychology* (pp. 175-205) Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Walqui, A. (2006). Scaffolding instruction for English language learners: A conceptual framework. *The International Journal of Bilingual Education & Bilingualism*, 9, (2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13670050608668639>
- Wenden, A. & Rubin, J. (1987). *Learner strategies in language learning*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall