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Investigating University Teachers' Perceptions of the Use of Scaffolding in EFL Classes at University Level

A B S T R A C T

This study investigates how university EFL teachers perceive scaffolding strategies for developing communicative skills, with focus on speaking and listening in higher education where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). Based on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the study adopts a quantitative methodology to provide an extensive understanding of teachers' perceptions through the administration of a questionnaire to a sample of 114 EFL teachers who provided quantitative data pertinent to their knowledge, beliefs, classroom practices, and perceived scaffolding challenges. Results show that teachers have mostly positive perceptions of scaffolding. Teachers highlight how peer collaboration, teacher modeling, gradual instruction, and prompt feedback enabled students to become more confident and perform better in oral activities. Despite their theoretical knowledge and favorable opinions of scaffolding, teachers report challenges such as time restraints, curriculum restrictions, and classroom diversity in putting the scaffolding into practice. This study recommends additional practical instruction and institutional support on the part of teachers due to the clear disconnect between scaffolding knowledge and practice. This study is expected to improve the overall understanding of scaffolding in EFL oral instruction in Iraqi universities. It further puts forward some constructive pedagogical implications for better scaffolding application to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the university EFL settings.

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دراسة تصورات أساتذة الجامعات حول استخدام استراتيجيات الدعم التدريجي في صفوف اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على المستوى الجامعي

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الخلاصة:

تهدف الدراسة إلى تقصي وجهات نظر بشأن استخدام استراتيجيات الدعم التدريجي (Scaffolding strategies) في تنمية مهارات التواصل، مع تركيز خاص على مهارتي التحدث والاستماع في بيئات

التعليم العالي حيث تُدرّس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. استنادًا إلى النظرية الاجتماعية الثقافية لعالم النفس فيغوتسكي (Vygotsky) ، التي تؤكد أهمية التفاعل الاجتماعي في تعلم اللغة، يبرز مفهوم منطقة النمو التقريبي (ZPD) كإطار يوضح الإمكانيات التي يمكن للمتعلمين تحقيقها بمساعدة الآخرين. تقدم هذه الدراسة الكمية فهما شاملا لتصورات المعلمين من خلال الإجابة على فقرات استبانة وزعت على ١١٤ تدريسيًا للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الجامعية في العراق من اجل جمع بيانات كمية تتعلق بمعارفهم، ومعتقداتهم، وممارساتهم الصفية، والتحديات التي يواجهونها في تطبيق استراتيجيات الدعم التدريجي. تُظهر النتائج أن التدريسيين يمتلكون في الغالب تصورا ايجابيا عن استراتيجيات الدعم التدريجي من حيث التعاون مع الأقران، ونمذجة المعلم، والتعليمات التدريجية، والتغذية الراجعة الفورية، والتي مجتمعة تمكنهم من أن يصبحوا أكثر ثقة ويؤدوا بشكل أفضل في الأنشطة الشفهية. على الرغم من امتلاكهم معرفة نظرية وآراء إيجابية حول استراتيجيات الدعم التدريجي، أفصح التدريسيون عن مواجهتهم بعض التحديات في التطبيق العملي، ممثلة بقيود الوقت، وضغط المناهج الدراسية، والتنوع في مستويات الطلاب داخل الفصول الدراسية. توصي الدراسة بتقديم المزيد من التعليمات العملية والدعم المؤسسي بسبب ال التباعد الواضح بين المعرفة والممارسة في استراتيجيات الدعم التدريجي. من خلال معرفة وجهات نظر التدريسيين، يتوقع أن تُحسّن هذه الدراسة الفهم الشامل الدعم التدريجي في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية شفهية. تختتم الدراسة ببعض التوصيات التربوية لتحسين تقنيات الدعم التدريجي التي ستسد فجوة المعرفة بين النظرية والممارسة في الدعم التدريجي للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الجامعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدعم التدريجي، أجنبية، مهارات، تصورات، النمو التقريبي.

1. Introduction

English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) in Iraqi universities. Given this context, most of the students and citizens do not rely on English in their daily life as they speak Arabic or Kurdish to communicate on a daily basis. However, at the present time, Iraq is more involved in international affairs such as politics, health, economics, education, UN activities, and much more where knowledge of English is quite demanding. English is also used as the main medium of instruction for university major levels; for example, science, medicine, engineering, education, politics, social studies, and computer majors (Rezaee et al., 2018). It is worth mentioning that English has become a dominant language in these majors, and proficiency in it is considered an important skill for academic and professional success. As a result, listening and speaking skills in English have become quite

essential for students to master so as to succeed in today's competitive world and secure a good future. However, students in many EFL situations in Iraq, struggle to improve these two skills due to lack of exposure to the EFL, large class numbers, and, Grammar-based curriculum and exam-focused instruction (Koya & Khalid, 2022). As a matter of fact, English is taught in Iraq, from primary school through university; however, many graduates still have poor spoken communication skills and struggle to effectively communicate in English. This is mostly because teacher-centered modes of instruction are still used and hence there is limited engagement and class-interaction. Also, when students speak English, they frequently feel nervous, unmotivated, or insecure (Koya & Khalid, 2022). In response to this situation, scaffolding is seen as one of the effective instructional approaches in boosting students' oral communication development wherein peer students or teachers provide structured-support to help out students and transfer the learning process from teacher-directed to students-directed learning. Scaffolding has been applied in language learning and utilized in EFL settings by many scholars, including Richards and Schmidt (2002), who describe the concept as a temporary and structured support offered by teachers to learners in order to help them complete a task or an activity so that, later on, they can do it on their own. Once students' progress and become more independent, teachers remove the support gradually. The current paper addresses the research question of how EFL university teachers perceive the use, practicality and challenges of scaffolding strategies in EFL classroom. Correspondingly, the hypothesis of this study is that University teachers hold positive perceptions of the use and application of scaffolding strategies in teaching listening and speaking skills in EFL contexts. This question and hypothesis guide the current study.

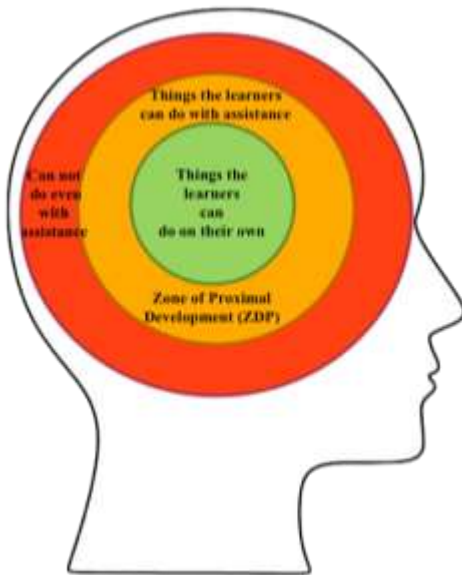
2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Sociocultural Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development

The sociocultural theory of learning, which was put forward by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky at the beginning of the 20th century, provides the basis for scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky places extreme priority on the significance of interaction and facilitation in understanding how people communicate with one another through language use, unlike behaviorism, which views language acquisition as the outcome of reinforcement and imitation. Furthermore, social and cultural interactions that primarily take place with peers or adults who serve as language models and scaffold their learning form a major

emphasis of the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Masrul, 2023). According to the theory, children can gain higher-order thinking skills by working together and interacting with more experienced and competent people (who could be peers or teachers) in what he dubbed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The sociocultural theory also relies heavily on the ZPD paradigm which is described by Vygotsky (1978) as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). As shown in Figure 1, the ZPD is not an actual spot but rather a representation of the process (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). It is conceptually represented as the space between what a person can do on their own and what they can do with the assistance of other individuals' help and guidance (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Figure 1: A Visual Representation of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)



Adapted from *Gilbert et al.*, 2013.

The concept of ZPD is central to Vygotsky's theory of language acquisition. It clarifies the distinction between what a learner can do independently and what they can accomplish with guidance or assistance from a more experienced and fluent person (Lantolf, 2000). Vygotsky asserts that learning occurs most effectively in the ZPD zone, where students work to raise their starting proficiency level with assistance from peers or teachers. Additionally, Vygotsky confirms that when given proper support and direction, students can learn more successfully (Vygotsky,

1978). Students participate in activities and tasks in the ZPD that are not constrained by their starting skill level. Such activities and tasks are challenging enough and invite students to think outside of the box and promote growth and critical thinking. For this purpose, scaffolding is used by teachers and students to bridge the gap in the ZPD zone (Mitchell & Myles, 2004).

2.2 Foundations of Scaffolding

Despite having contributed to the development of scaffolding, Vygotsky did not create the term. His social theory of interaction had a crucial role in the scaffolding conceptual framework. Jerome Bruner, a cognitive psychologist, coined the term "scaffolding" in the 1970s. According to Wood et al. (1976), scaffolding occurs when an adult manages the aspects of the task that are fundamentally outside the learner's capabilities, allowing them to focus on and finish only the tasks that are within their area of expertise (p. 90). Wood et al. (1976) extended the idea of scaffolding for the SLA context based on Vygotsky's ZPD theory. According to them, scaffolding is the support that teachers or peers provide to help students who are facing learning challenges complete a task that they would not be able to complete on their own. More precisely, Bruner explains how informal instruction promotes learning in early children by using the scaffolding concept (Wood et al., 1976, as quoted in Daniels, 1994). Studies on language acquisition by Wood et al. (1976) focus on how teachers and more experienced people help students who need more assistance and language instruction. One of the core components of children's learning known as "guided by others" is frequently the focus of scaffolding approaches (Stone 1998, p. 351). The terms "help," "support," "guidance," and "assistance" are frequently used with the phrase "scaffolding" (Stone 1998; Richards and Schmidt, 2002). Similarly, Stone (1998) explains this method as follows: A building cannot stand alone without supports when it is about to be built in its early stages. The support is taken down to allow it to stand freely once the construction phase is finished. In a similar vein, teachers, professionals, or other students offer support and help to the extent that the other person can eventually do the activity at hand on their own. However, similar to the scaffolding that builders actually use when constructing buildings, the help that these students receive is gradually reduced as their language skills advance (Wood et al., 1976; Richards and Schmidt, 2002; Pressly, 2002; Walqui 2006; Sawyer, 2006). Over time, the idea of scaffolding expanded and permeated various areas of applied linguistics, including second language acquisition and education. The scaffolding

approach began to be used in the setting with SLA in the 1980s and 1990s. Scholars like Nassaji and Swain (2000) and Gibbons (2003) employed scaffolding to understand how teachers and second language learners interact in terms of comprehension and language production. Furthermore, Gibbons (2003) highlights the use of scaffolding in classroom settings as a successful way to encourage language and subject learning, emphasizing the necessity of teacher involvement and assistance in giving students the linguistic input they require to become proficient. Additionally, the sociocultural theory is still developing and focuses on how people connect with one another.

2.3 Related Studies

A number of studies that examined teachers' perceptions of scaffolding in EFL contexts are presented in this section. These studies shed light on how teachers perceive the effectiveness of, challenges behind, and real-world implementation of scaffolding techniques. To gain a deeper insight into the EFL teachers' perceptions, Hung and Nguyen (2022) used a mixed-method study that included questionnaires and follow-up interviews to investigate how Vietnamese EFL teachers perceived scaffolding techniques in speaking sessions. The majority of teachers stated that scaffolding strategies, including progressive task help, modelling, and guided questioning, were very successful in raising students' motivation and speaking abilities. Although several teachers emphasized issues with class size and time limits, many also showed a strong belief in the benefits of scaffolding. In general, teachers had very positive perceptions of scaffolding and acknowledged its educational value. In addition, Awadelkarim (2021) investigates the views and perceptions of 30 EFL instructors at Majmaah University in Saudi Arabia about scaffolding through a questionnaire and focus groups. Teachers generally showed good sentiments regarding the role of scaffolding in increasing students' learning, despite the fact that many teachers admitted lacking thorough practical experience of scaffolding procedures. Several teachers expressed their lack of confidence in their ability to implement scaffolding successfully in their classes, despite their theoretical understanding of it. According to this study, there is a common mismatch between the pedagogical competence and positive attitudes of EFL teachers. Using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, Chau & Nguyen (2021) investigated the perceptions of 79 high school EFL teachers in Vietnam about scaffolding. The results demonstrated that more than 88% of teachers understood scaffolding as providing detailed direction and support for challenging

reading assignments. Although 85% of respondents mentioned difficulties with mixed-ability courses and time restrictions, interview findings showed that scaffolding encouraged two-way interaction, decreased student fear, and boosted active classroom engagement. Another study by Mai et. al (2023) further explored 88 university English teachers' perceptions in Vietnam using focus groups and a 5 Likert-scale questionnaire. The results revealed a generally positive attitude, even though many teachers acknowledged that they lacked comprehensive pedagogical knowledge. Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of professional training for teachers on scaffolding for an effective implementation. Based on the studies reviewed, it can be deduced that all the researchers confirmed that scaffolding enhances EFL students' communications skills, despite the fact that few of these studies connect their findings to participant perspectives or contextual situations. The researchers only consider experimental outcomes without taking into account the perceptions of teachers or students, thus resulting in a knowledge gap regarding how scaffolding is actually regarded in the classroom. Despite the fact that the experimental studies focused on gains and statistical descriptions, most studies that rely on interviews offer useful information on students and teachers' perceptions.

3. Methodology

This study has been conducted to explore how a scaffolding-based approach improves students' oral performance, particularly their speaking and listening skills. Within the EFL context, the study aims to collect insights from university teachers to gather information on their viewpoints and perceptions of the scaffolding-based approach. Such a quantitative approach has also been used in similar studies on scaffolding in EFL contexts, such as the studies of Awadelkarim (2021), and Hung & Nguyen (2022). The data have been gathered by means of both surveys and questionnaires to provide in-depth insights into scaffolding strategies as an interactive teaching approach in the EFL university context.

3.1. Participants of the Study

114 English language teachers from universities across Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region, participated voluntarily in this study. Moreover, purposive sampling has been employed in this study to choose participants for teacher questionnaire, ensuring that significant and relevant insights match the primary goals of the study (Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.2. Instrument of the Study (Questionnaire)

A structured questionnaire was adapted from Awadelkarim (2021) and administered to explore and analyze the university EFL teachers' perceptions of scaffolding in EFL instruction. The questionnaire aimed to address the first research question, which focuses on teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and classroom practices. In educational studies, questionnaires are commonly recognized as useful instruments for obtaining subjective responses and offering further insights that cannot be explicitly observed through experimental methods (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Moreover, the use of the questionnaire enabled the researchers to collect data and feedback from a wider range of participants and various universities in Iraq. Moreover, 20 closed-ended items were arranged into four main themes. Participants were able to indicate how much each statement was related to their teaching beliefs and practices by rating each item on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting a very low extent and 5 denoting a very high extent. The Likert scale is practical and builds a degree of flexibility and differentiation of answers while still producing numbers (Cohen et al., 2007). The scale aims to quantify frequency, intensity, or agreement, depending on each item.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

The instruments of the study are cross-checked by a group of qualified linguists and university professors, who checked the first draft to ensure content validity. The phrasing and item sequence were somewhat altered as a result of their input. Before the items were distributed widely, a pilot test with 20 teachers was also carried out to further improve the items of the questionnaire and confirm their relevance and clarity. After this phase, a minor change was applied to the 5 Likert scale phrasing to better align with teachers' perceptions and preferences when rating each item. The jury panel advised the researchers to make the questions shorter and more direct so that the participants can easily comprehend the questions. The recommended adjustments were made to enhance the flow and clarity of all items. Moreover, to examine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items, Cronbach's Alpha was used. The obtained coefficient ($\alpha = 0.82$) shows a strong reliability, exceeds the commonly accepted benchmark of 0.70.

4.1 Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

The data analysis has been carried out through descriptive statistics using SPSS and statistical methods and tables to analysis and show the results. The following data analysis procedures were chosen to measure both datasets and address the research question and hypotheses.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis of Knowledge and Awareness of Scaffolding

The first theme of this study's questionnaire explored participants' knowledge and awareness of scaffolding techniques in EFL contexts as shown in Table 4.1. The participants' reported levels of awareness that ranged from moderate to high. With the highest mean ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.753$), the item "I know about Vygotsky's ZPD model" demonstrated a comparatively high level of acquaintance with the theoretical foundations of scaffolding. High levels of perceived practical awareness were also shown by the items "I am aware of scaffolding strategies for EFL classrooms" ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.774$) and "I know how to build up and lay off scaffolding in my EFL classroom" ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.795$). However, "I am aware of some theoretical frameworks of scaffolding (e.g., reading some literature in the field)" received the lowest rating ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.970$), indicating that although many participants show applied comprehension, fewer reported that they had to engage substantially with literature and theoretical models.

Table 4.1: Results of the Descriptive Analysis of Knowledge and Awareness of Scaffolding

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am aware of some theoretical frameworks of scaffolding (for example reading some literature in the field).	114	1	5	3.20	.970
I am conscious of scaffolding strategies for EFL classrooms.	114	1	5	3.66	.774
I know what scaffolding constructs are.	114	1	5	3.56	.639
I know about Vygotsky's ZPD model.	114	1	5	3.74	.753
I know how to build up and lay off scaffolding in my EFL classroom.	114	2	5	3.67	.795

The majority of the participants showed a moderate level of awareness of scaffolding strategies in EFL contexts, based on the responses under theme one. On

a 5-point Likert scale, the mean scores for each item varied from 3.2 to 3.74, showing a general level of agreement with questionnaire items. These responses imply that scaffolding as a teaching method is fundamentally understood by the EFL university professors. Their answers demonstrate an understanding that scaffolding entails dividing work into manageable parts, providing guided support, and progressively transferring responsibility to students . These findings are consistent with the theoretical foundations, specifically (ZPD) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) which highlight the function of teacher mediation in learning. The results also support empirical research by Gibbons (2005) which found out that although many EFL teachers were aware of scaffolding principles, their actual classroom practices differed. Additionally, this theme backs up Nguyen and Boers' (2019) assertion that scaffolding enhances speaking skills and requires both conceptual understanding and practical competence.

4.3 Descriptive Analysis of Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions

The majority of participants had favorable perceptions of scaffolding as displayed in Table 4.2. The item "I think EFL teachers must be trained in scaffolding" received the highest rating ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.608$), demonstrating a general agreement on the need for professional development in this area. Teachers' understanding of scaffolding's practical value and personal engagement was demonstrated by the responses to the following items "I think scaffolding is useful for EFL classrooms" ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.870$) and "I enjoy scaffolding EFL learners" ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.690$). The item with the lowest rating was "Scaffolds help students build on prior knowledge and comprehend new information" ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.825$), however the mean still indicated general agreement. This may suggest that although educators appreciate scaffolding, some may not completely understand how it affects the acquisition of knowledge. Surprisingly, the item that "scaffolding's ultimate goal is learners' autonomy and independence" received a reasonably adequate rating ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.854$), indicating that teachers understand scaffolding's long-term growth-related objective in addition to its immediate support in the classroom. Moreover, these results suggest that teachers generally consider scaffolding to be a useful and effective approach.

Table 4.2: Results of the Descriptive Analysis of Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I believe scaffolding is useful for EFL classrooms.	114	2	5	3.60	.870
I enjoy scaffolding EFL learners.	114	2	5	3.58	.690
I think EFL teachers must be trained in scaffolding.	114	2	5	3.81	.608
Scaffolds help students build on prior knowledge and internalize new information.	114	1	5	3.32	.825
I think scaffolding's ultimate goal is learners' autonomy and independence.	114	2	5	3.53	.854

These findings suggest that EFL teachers understand the value of scaffolding in fostering learners' confidence and progressive mastery of speaking and listening skills. The narrow range of scores may indicate some uncertainty or contextual limits that determine how notions such as class size, time, or institutional policies are converted into practice. Similar results were observed by Chau & Nguyen (2021), Hung and Nguyen (2022) and Mai et. al (2023) , who pointed out that although teachers might differ in how consistently they used scaffolding, they frequently supported the concept. This implies that in order to bridge the gap between belief and classroom implementation, ongoing professional guidance is required.

4.4 Descriptive Analysis of Practicing scaffolding in EFL Setting

Descriptive analysis of this theme is shown in Table 3.3. The item with the highest mean score ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.577$) was "My use of scaffolding leads to better learning outcomes," indicating a strong belief in the effectiveness of scaffolding. Actual classroom procedures, however, received a far lower score. For instance, the item "I employ an appropriate amount of scaffolding for each learner" had the lowest score ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.103$), while the item "I use scaffolding strategies in EFL classrooms" had the lowest mean ($SD = 1.091$). These findings highlight a significant mismatch between implementation and what teachers think of scaffolding. According to the item, "I gradually lay off scaffolding to make learners independent," a moderate number of participants ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.639$) agreed with gradual release strategies. However, there was little evidence to support the item "I prepare more scaffolds for beginners or low-achievers" ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.844$).

Table 4.3: Results of the Descriptive Analysis of Practicing scaffolding in EFL Setting

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I use scaffolding strategies in EFL classrooms.	114	1	5	2.50	1.091
I prepare more scaffolds for the beginners or low-achiever students.	114	1	4	2.52	.844
I gradually lay off scaffolding to make learners independent.	114	1	4	3.26	.639
I employ an appropriate amount of scaffolding for each learner.	114	1	5	2.22	1.103
My use of scaffolding leads to better learning outcomes.	114	3	5	4.25	.577

These findings point to a mismatch between teachers' beliefs and their practical teaching methods. Although the majority of respondents agreed that scaffolding improves results, fewer said they actively or suitably used it for a range of student needs.

4.5 Descriptive Analysis of Challenges Encountered in Using Scaffolding in EFL Settings

The results shown in Table 3.4 highlight a number of commonly held assumptions that could prevent scaffolding strategies from being used effectively in EFL classes. The item "Scaffolding takes too much time and efforts" had the highest level of agreement ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.701$), indicating that teachers' main complaint is that it requires a significant amount of time. The item, "I am not skilled or well-trained on how to use scaffolding strategies," was likewise highly agreed upon with by teachers ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.993$). The lack of authentic visual aids is another significant concern; the item "There is shortage of visual materials..." received a moderate mean score of 3.10 ($SD = 0.940$). "Cultural differences" had lower mean ratings ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.944$), indicating that while sociocultural diversity is acknowledged, the majority of respondents do not view it as a big obstacle. The last item, "Difference in students' levels and motivation..." ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.996$), however, shows that students preparation diversity is still a significant obstacle, particularly when working in groups or cooperatively.

Table 4.4: Results of the Descriptive Analysis of Challenges in Using Scaffolding in EFL Settings

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Scaffolding takes too much time and efforts.	114	2	5	3.89	.701
I am not skillful or well-trained on how to use scaffolding strategies in my EFL course.	114	1	5	3.71	.993
There is shortage of visual materials, such as pictures, videos, models or other modes of authentic materials, to support scaffolding throughout the lecture.	114	2	5	3.10	.940
Cultural differences and social statutes between students make using scaffolding harder at times.	114	1	5	2.68	.944
Difference in students' levels and motivation makes it challenging to apply scaffolding effectively for everyone equally especially during peer or group work tasks.	114	1	5	3.55	.996

These results also echo the interview findings, where one participant admitted feeling “overwhelmed,” especially when group work involved mixed-ability students. One student noted, “Sometimes it’s hard when you work in groups and not everyone is good, and that makes me stress.” This supports the survey question about learner-level differences hindering identical reinforcement. Collectively, based on the results, teachers are relatively aware of scaffolding and hold favorable perceptions about it (Themes 1 & 2). Implementation is inconsistent, nevertheless, and numerous individuals point to learner diversity, time constraints, and training as barriers (Themes 3 & 4). As a result, though the perceptions are generally positive, their actual use is restricted and depends upon the context of instruction. On this basis, the hypothesis is accepted as the findings of the study confirm that EFL University teachers and professors think scaffolding is beneficial, especially for enhancing oral communication.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand teachers’ perception of the effectiveness of scaffolding-based approach in improving university EFL speaking and listening skills. The study has made use of quantitative methodology to combine data from the questionnaire filled out by 114 EFL university teachers in order to address the research aims, questions and hypotheses. The findings of this

study highlight that scaffolding in EFL classes has been perceived positively by the university teachers as the vast majority acknowledged the effectiveness of scaffolding, particularly in supporting students' engagement and improving their oral skills. However, there have been a few such as time limits and diversity of students' levels were pinpointed by the participants that might affect the efficiency of scaffolding. Furthermore, scaffolding is both valued and effective in higher education EFL context. The results of the current study clearly support the Hypothesis and are consistent with the Research Question 1.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, the following recommendations are proposed: (1) incorporating scaffolding strategies into the EFL speaking and listening courses as these strategies consistently show strong positive outcomes. (2) to bring about professional development, EFL university teachers ought to receive instruction on scaffolding principles and effective application. This is expected to enable them to track and enhance scaffolding practices adjust scaffolding to fit those students who are less competent or self-assured.

7. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of the current paper suggest two key pedagogical implications for the EFL context in Iraq:

1. Teachers are ought to promote active learning and collaboration among students including individual task, pair work and group projects in EFL classroom.
2. Teachers should adjust the degree of scaffolding to support the growth of spoken language, foster peer cooperation. They should further align assessment practices with scaffolding objectives for effective implementation.

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