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The Impact of Scaffolding Strategies on EFL Students' Speaking Skills at Sabratha University from Teachers and Students Perspectives

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Degree of Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics

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Abstract

Many students suffer from limited vocabulary, hesitation, and high speaking anxiety, particularly because they have little exposure to English outside the classroom. While scaffolding is known to support oral development, its actual use in Libyan higher education has not been sufficiently explored. This study examined the scaffolding strategies used in EFL speaking classes at Sabratha University, gathered students' opinions on their effectiveness, identified the obstacles teachers face and evaluated the perceived impact on speaking performance. A mixed-methods design was used. Data were collected through a questionnaire completed by 67 fourth-year EFL students and semi-structured interviews with 9 EFL teachers. The questionnaire responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the interviews were analyzed thematically.

The findings revealed that procedural scaffolding (clear directions, detailed explanations, and repeated instructions) was the most frequently used strategy. Both students and teachers considered it valuable because it lowered anxiety and helped learners understand what was expected of them. Modeling and visual support were also common, and students generally reacted positively to these techniques. However, interactional scaffolding, especially the use of guiding questions to promote independent speech, was the least applied. Teachers attributed this to large class sizes, limited time, and concerns about putting students under pressure in front of their peers.

This study concluded that scaffolding is a useful tool for EFL speaking instruction at Sabratha University, yet its potential is limited by practical classroom conditions. It is recommended that teachers receive training in interactional scaffolding, class sizes for speaking courses be reduced, and speaking tasks be designed to gradually transfer responsibility to the learners.

Keywords: Scaffolding, Speaking Skills, EFL, Mixed-Methods, Sabratha University

Declaration

I hereby acknowledge that this study is my original work, with the exception of properly cited quotations and references. I further acknowledge that it has not been submitted to the University of Zawia or any other institution.

Signatura _____

Date _____

Dedication

To my father, thank you for believing in me and always encouraging me to keep going.

To my mother, your love, prayers, and support have always been my greatest strength.

To my husband, thank you for standing by my side and supporting me throughout this journey.

To my children, you are my greatest motivation, and every success is for you.

To my mother-in-law, thank you for your kindness, encouragement, and support.

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List of Abbreviations

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development
ESL	English as a Second Language

Chapter One:
Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the present study and introduces the main aspects of the research. It begins with the background of the study, which highlights the importance of speaking skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and discusses the challenges university students face in speaking fluently and confidently. The chapter then presents the statement of the problem, the aims of the study, and the research questions that guide the investigation. In addition, it explains the significance of the study, and the key terms related to the research. The chapter concludes with an outline of the overall structure of the study.

1.1 Background and Rationale of the Study

Speaking is a central skill in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning because it enables students to express ideas, participate in discussions and communicate in real-life situations. Although many students develop basic language knowledge, they often experience difficulties when asked to speak fluently and confidently. University EFL learners commonly struggle with limited vocabulary, hesitation, fear of making mistakes and anxiety during oral tasks. These challenges reduce their willingness to participate and slow their progress in speaking (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020).

Teachers frequently rely on scaffolding strategies. Scaffolding refers to temporary support that helps students complete tasks they cannot handle alone and this support is gradually reduced as learners become more capable. The concept is grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, especially the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which highlights how learners benefit from guided interaction with a more knowledgeable person (Vygotsky, 1978). In speaking classes, scaffolding may involve modeling language, offering prompts, simplifying tasks, using visual aids or providing structured opportunities for practice.

In Libya, the development of speaking skills remains one of the major challenges in higher education, many EFL students at Sabratha University struggle to use English orally due to

limited exposure outside the classroom, traditional teaching methods, and the absence of structured speaking practice. Although teachers often use various forms of scaffolding, little is known about how these strategies are applied in speaking lessons, how students perceive them and what challenges teachers face when implementing them (Assally, 2025).

In the Libyan higher education context, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students face significant difficulties in developing their speaking skills, as observed by the researcher through direct engagement and classroom interaction. These challenges are often exacerbated by the lack of sufficient pedagogical support in the classroom, particularly in terms of effective teaching strategies. One key approach to addressing these difficulties is the use of scaffolding strategies, which are designed to help students accomplish tasks that are beyond their current abilities by providing temporary support. However, the application of these strategies in EFL classrooms may be inconsistent and students may not always recognize or effectively utilize the scaffolding provided. Despite the recognized importance of scaffolding in language acquisition, there is limited research on its application and impact within Libyan universities, specifically at Sabratha University. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the current scaffolding practices employed in speaking lessons from both teachers and students' perspectives. This will help in understanding how these strategies contribute to improving students speaking skills and provide insights into the challenges faced by both students and instructors in the process (Orafi & Borg, 2009).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Many EFL students in Libyan universities, particularly at Sabratha University, struggle to develop their speaking skills due to insufficient pedagogical support and a lack of structured speaking practice. This issue is compounded by the limited exposure students have to English outside the classroom, traditional teaching methods and inconsistent application of scaffolding strategies by some instructors. Furthermore, students often fail to recognize or effectively utilize the scaffolding provided, leading to suboptimal learning outcomes and persistent challenges in speaking proficiency. Despite the acknowledged benefits of scaffolding in improving speaking skills, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the application of these strategies in Libyan higher education, particularly in the context of speaking classes (Mktad, 2025). This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the scaffolding strategies used in speaking

lessons at Sabratha University and examining the challenges and effectiveness of these strategies from both teachers and students perspectives.

1.3 Aims of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Identify the scaffolding strategies commonly used by EFL teachers in speaking classes at Sabratha University.
2. Examine students' perceptions of how these strategies support their speaking development.
3. Investigate the perceived impact of scaffolding strategies on students speaking fluency, accuracy and confidence.
4. Explore the main challenges and limitations teachers encounter when using scaffolding during speaking instruction.

1.4 Research Questions

To explore the role of educational support in developing speaking skills, the study addresses the following questions through the research gap:

1. What scaffolding strategies do EFL teachers at Sabratha University use in their speaking classes?
2. How do students perceive the effectiveness of these scaffolding strategies in improving their speaking skills?
3. What is the perceived impact of scaffolding strategies on students speaking performance?
4. What challenges do teachers face when applying scaffolding techniques in speaking lessons?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it gives voice to undergraduate students at the University of Sabratha, allowing them to share their experiences and perceptions about the support they receive during speaking tasks. It also contributes to the limited body of research on scaffolding within the Libyan higher education context, particularly regarding the development of speaking

skills. The findings may serve as a valuable reference for teacher training programs, not only at the University of Sabratha but also across other institutions in Libya. Additionally, this research could help improve the quality of English teaching by encouraging the use of proven instructional methods that better support students in developing their speaking abilities.

1.6 Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research approach; quantitative data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire distributed to 67 undergraduate EFL students, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with 9 EFL teachers within the defined research context.Detailed procedures related to data collection, statistical analysis and data interpretation were presented in Chapter Three. In conducting this study, ethical considerations were carefully observed. The confidentiality of all information provided by participants was respected and the anonymity of students and teachers was ensured. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences. A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the questionnaire and interview questions were clear, appropriate and free from any discriminatory or unacceptable language.

1.7 Structure of the Study

Chapter One Introduction provides the background, significance, research problem, questions, objectives, scope and limitations of the study. It also outlines the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two Literature Review presents key theories related to scaffolding and speaking skills, reviews previous empirical studies, and highlights existing gaps particularly in Libyan higher education that justify the current research.

Chapter Three Methodology describes the mixed-methods design, participants, instruments (student questionnaire and teacher interview guide), procedures for data collection and methods used for data analysis.

Chapter Four Data Analysis and Discussion reports the results obtained from both the quantitative data collected through the students' questionnaire and the qualitative data gathered from the teachers' interviews. Quantitative findings are presented using descriptive statistics, while qualitative findings are analyzed through thematic analysis. The chapter further interprets

these findings in relation to the existing literature, highlights their significance, and examines the role of scaffolding in developing EFL students' speaking skills within the Libyan educational context.

Chapter Five Conclusion and Recommendations summarizes the study, discusses its significance and limitations and provides recommendations for teachers, curriculum designers and future researchers.

1.8 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has introduced the background and context of the study, highlighting the importance of speaking skills in EFL learning and the role of scaffolding strategies in supporting students' oral development. It has presented the research problem, the rationale and significance of the study, as well as the research questions and objectives. In addition, the chapter has outlined the delimitations of the research and provided a brief overview of the research methodology and ethical considerations. This introductory chapter establishes the foundation for the study and clarifies its scope and direction. The next chapter presents a review of the relevant literature related to scaffolding strategies and speaking skills in EFL contexts.

Chapter Two
Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides the theoretical and empirical foundation for the present study, which investigates the use of scaffolding strategies in developing speaking skills among EFL students at the university level. A literature review is essential in academic research because it allows the researcher to examine existing theories, concepts and previous findings related to the research topic and to position the current study within the broader academic context.

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for learners to master, particularly in contexts where English is not used outside the classroom. University students often face difficulties related to limited exposure to authentic language use, anxiety, lack of confidence and insufficient instructional support during speaking activities. As a result, researchers and educators have increasingly emphasized the importance of instructional approaches that actively support learners during the learning process rather than leaving them to perform complex tasks independently.

One such approach is scaffolding, which has its theoretical roots in cognitive and sociocultural learning theories. Scaffolding refers to the temporary and adjustable support provided by teachers or more capable peers to help learners accomplish tasks that they cannot complete on their own. This support is gradually withdrawn as learners gain confidence and competence, enabling them to perform independently. Previous research has shown that scaffolding plays a significant role in language development, particularly in enhancing learners speaking fluency, accuracy and confidence (Gibbons, 2015; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

This chapter reviews key theoretical perspectives on scaffolding, with particular focus on the contributions of Vygotsky and Bruner to cognitive development and learning. These theories provided a strong conceptual framework for understanding how scaffolding functions in language learning and how it supports speaking development. In addition, the chapter examines different types and principles of scaffolding, practical scaffolding strategies used in EFL speaking instruction, as well as the benefits and challenges associated with their implementation.

Furthermore, this chapter reviews empirical studies related to scaffolding in language learning across different educational levels, highlighting major research findings and identifying gaps in the existing literature. Special attention is given to the limited number of studies conducted in EFL university contexts, particularly within Libyan higher education by synthesizing theoretical insights and research findings.

2.1 Definition of Scaffolding in Language Learning

Scaffolding is a key instructional concept in contemporary educational theory and has gained particular importance in language learning contexts. The term was first introduced to describe the supportive role that teachers or more knowledgeable individuals play in helping learners accomplish tasks that are initially beyond their independent ability. In language education, scaffolding is understood as a form of guided support that enables learners to gradually develop linguistic competence and communicative confidence (Wood et al., 1976).

In general educational terms, scaffolding refers to the temporary assistance provided during the learning process, which is adjusted according to learners needs and gradually withdrawn as learners gain mastery. This support does not simplify the learning task itself; rather, it helps learners manage the task until they are able to perform it independently. As learners skills improve, the level of support decreases, allowing responsibility for learning to shift from the teacher to the learner (Van de Pol et al., 2010).

Within language learning, scaffolding played a critical role because acquiring a new language involves complex cognitive and social processes. Learners are required to process new vocabulary, grammatical structures, pronunciation patterns and pragmatic rules simultaneously. For EFL learners, especially in contexts where exposure to English is limited to the classroom, these demands can be overwhelming. Scaffolding helps reduce this cognitive burden by offering structured support that makes language use more accessible and manageable (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

In EFL instruction, scaffolding can take many forms, such as modeling correct language use, providing sentence starters, offering guiding questions, using visual aids, breaking tasks into smaller steps and giving timely feedback. These forms of supporting help learners understand what is expected of them and how to express their ideas more effectively. Importantly,

scaffolding is not a fixed set of techniques but a flexible process that depends on learners proficiency levels, learning goals, and classroom context (Gibbons, 2015).

From a communicative perspective, scaffolding is especially relevant to speaking skills. Speaking requires learners to produce language in real time, which involves planning ideas, selecting appropriate language forms, and articulating them clearly under time pressure. Without adequate support, many EFL learners experience anxiety, hesitation and fear of making mistakes. Scaffolding addresses these challenges by creating a supportive environment in which learners feel safe to experiment with language and gradually build fluency and confidence (Thornbury, 2005).

2.2 Theories of Scaffolding

This section presents the theoretical background related to speaking fluency and the shadowing technique in EFL learning. It discusses the main theories and concepts that support the study and explain how shadowing may contribute to improving speaking performance.

2.2.1 Vygotsky (1978) on Cognitive Development and Learning

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development provides a foundational framework for understanding scaffolding in language learning. His Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that learning is not an individual process that occurs in isolation, but a socially mediated activity shaped through interaction with others. According to Vygotsky, cognitive development is deeply influenced by social interaction, cultural tools, and language, which together support learners in constructing knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978).

A central concept in Vygotsky's theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the gap between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guidance from a more knowledgeable person, such as a teacher or a capable peer. Learning is most effective when instruction targets this zone, as learners are challenged beyond their current level while still receiving adequate support. Within this framework, scaffolding functions as the practical mechanism through which assistance is provided inside the ZPD.

In language learning and particularly in EFL speaking instruction, the ZPD is highly relevant. Speaking requires learners to perform complex cognitive and linguistic processes

simultaneously, including idea formulation, lexical selection, grammatical organization and real-time articulation. When learners are supported through guided interaction, such as teacher modeling, questioning or corrective feedback, they are able to participate in speaking tasks that would otherwise be too demanding. Over time as learners internalize these processes, the external support is gradually withdrawn, leading to increased independence and confidence.

Many scholars strongly support Vygotsky's perspective and consider it the theoretical foundation of scaffolding. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) argued that language development occurs primarily through social interaction and that guided participation is essential for internalizing linguistic knowledge. Similarly, Swain, Kinnear and Steinman (2015) emphasized that collaborative dialogue allows learners to co-construct meaning and refine their language use, particularly during speaking activities. From this viewpoint, scaffolding is not simply instructional support but a dynamic social process that promotes deeper cognitive engagement.

Empirical research in EFL contexts also supports Vygotsky's ideas. Studies have shown that teacher-student interaction, peer collaboration and dialogic feedback enhance learners' oral performance by reducing anxiety and encouraging risk-taking in speaking (Ellis, 2008). These findings align with Vygotsky's claim that learning precedes development when appropriate social support is provided.

However, despite its strong influence, Vygotsky's theory has also been subject to criticism. Some researchers argue that the concept of the ZPD is difficult to define and measure empirically. Chaiklin (2003) noted that determining the exact boundaries of a learner's ZPD can be challenging, particularly in classroom settings with diverse proficiency levels. This ambiguity makes it difficult for teachers to identify the appropriate amount and type of support needed for each learner. Other scholars have raised concerns about the practical application of sociocultural theory in formal educational contexts. Kirschner, Sweller and Clark (2006) argued that excessive reliance on guided interaction without sufficient explicit instruction may place a heavy cognitive load on learners, especially beginners. From this perspective, scaffolding based solely on social interaction may not always lead to efficient learning outcomes if learners lack foundational knowledge.

Despite these critiques, many contemporary researchers maintained that Vygotsky's theory remains highly relevant when applied thoughtfully. Rather than rejecting the ZPD, recent studies suggest combining sociocultural principles with structured instructional design to ensure

effective scaffolding in EFL speaking instruction. This means balancing interaction-based support with clear guidance, modeling and gradual withdrawal of assistance (Van de Pol, Volman & Beishuizen, 2010).

In summary, Vygotsky's theory views learning as a socially mediated process in which cognitive development is supported through interaction within the ZPD. His ideas provide a strong theoretical justification for scaffolding in EFL speaking classrooms, highlighting the importance of guided support, collaborative dialogue and gradual learner independence. While challenges remain in applying the theory consistently, its contribution to understanding how learners develop speaking skills through social interaction is widely recognized.

2.2.2 Bruner on Cognitive Development and Learning

Bruner's theory of cognitive development played a central role in shaping the educational concept of scaffolding, particularly from a practical and instructional perspective. While Vygotsky provided the sociocultural foundation for understanding guided learning, Bruner and his colleagues were among the first to introduce scaffolding as a concrete teaching concept within classroom settings. Bruner viewed learning as an active process in which learners construct new knowledge by building on prior understanding through guided exploration and structured support (Wood et al., 1976).

A key principle in Bruner's theory is discovery learning, which emphasizes that learners learn more effectively when they are encouraged to actively explore and discover concepts rather than receive information passively. However, Bruner did not advocate for unguided discovery. Instead, he emphasized the importance of teacher guidance in structuring tasks, directing attention and reducing task complexity. In this sense, scaffolding functions as a means of supporting learners during the discovery process until they are able to manage learning tasks independently.

The concept of scaffolding was clearly articulated by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), who described it as the process by which a teacher controls elements of a task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity. Through this support learners are able to focus on manageable aspects of the task while gradually developing the skills needed for full task completion. This definition highlights scaffolding as a temporary and adaptive form of assistance, closely aligned with Bruner's broader view of cognitive development. Another important contribution of Bruner is

the spiral curriculum, which suggests that complex ideas can be taught at any stage of development if they are presented in an intellectually honest and well-structured way. Learning according to this model, occurs through repeated exposure to concepts, with increasing levels of complexity over time. In language learning, this principle supports the idea that speaking skills can be developed progressively through carefully sequenced tasks, where scaffolding helps learners revisit and refine language use at higher levels of proficiency.

In EFL speaking instruction, Bruner's ideas are particularly relevant. Speaking tasks often require learners to manage linguistic, cognitive and social demands simultaneously. Scaffolding based on Bruner's framework may involve modeling spoken language, providing prompts or sentence frames, organizing speaking activities step by step and offering feedback that guides learners toward more accurate and fluent production.

Such structured support allows learners to participate actively in speaking tasks while gradually assuming greater responsibility for their performance. Many contemporary scholars support Bruner's perspective and highlight its practical value in language classrooms. Gibbons (2015) argues that effective scaffolding enables learners to engage in meaningful oral interaction while still receiving sufficient guidance to succeed. Similarly, Hammond and Gibbons (2005) emphasize that structured support is essential for helping learners move from assisted performance to independent language use, particularly in speaking activities that require real-time processing. However, Bruner's theory and the concept of discovery learning have also been criticized. Some researchers argue that discovery-based approaches may place excessive cognitive demands on learners, especially those with limited prior knowledge. Mayer (2004) contends that minimally guided instruction is often less effective than guided approaches, particularly for novice learners. From this perspective, discovery learning without adequate scaffolding may hinder rather than support learning.

Further criticism comes from cognitive load theorists, who suggest that learners benefit more from explicit instruction than from open-ended discovery. Sweller, Ayres and Kalyuga (2011) argue that learning environments should minimize unnecessary cognitive load by providing clear guidance and structured input. These scholars caution that if scaffolding is not carefully planned, learners may struggle to extract relevant information during complex tasks, including speaking activities. In response to these critiques, recent research has emphasized a balanced interpretation of Bruner's theory. Rather than rejecting discovery learning, scholars argue that

it should be combined with well-designed scaffolding to ensure learning effectiveness. Kirschner and Hendrick (2020) note that guided discovery, supported by clear instructional structure, allows learners to benefit from exploration while avoiding cognitive overload. In EFL speaking instruction, this balanced approach enables learners to experiment with language in supportive conditions while receiving sufficient guidance to improve accuracy and fluency.

In summary, Bruner's theory contributes a practical and instructional perspective to the concept of scaffolding. His emphasis on structured guidance, progressive learning and active learner engagement provides valuable insights for designing effective speaking instruction in EFL contexts. While criticisms highlight the risks of insufficient guidance, contemporary interpretations suggest that Bruner's ideas remain highly relevant when applied through carefully planned and responsive scaffolding practices.

2.3 Similarities Between Vygotsky's (1978) and Bruner's (1986) Theories

Although Vygotsky and Bruner approached learning from different theoretical backgrounds, their views share several important similarities that form the conceptual foundation of scaffolding in education. Both theories emphasize that learning is an active process in which learners construct knowledge through engagement, interaction and guided support rather than passive reception of information. These shared assumptions help explain why both perspectives are widely used to support instructional practices in EFL speaking classrooms.

One major similarity between the two theories is their view of learning as an active and constructive process. Vygotsky and Bruner both reject the idea that learners simply absorb knowledge transmitted by the teacher. Instead, they argue that learners actively participate in meaning-making by engaging with tasks, materials and others. In EFL speaking instruction, this perspective highlights the importance of involving learners in meaningful speaking activities where they actively use language to express ideas, negotiate meaning and solve communicative problems (Bruner, 1986; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Another important point of similarity is the central role of interaction in learning. Vygotsky emphasizes social interaction as the driving force behind cognitive development, particularly through dialogue with more knowledgeable individuals. Similarly Bruner views interaction as essential for guiding learners through structured discovery and supporting their understanding of new concepts. In both theories, language serves as a key tool for mediating learning. In

speaking classrooms, interaction between teachers and students, as well as peer interaction, creates opportunities for learners to develop oral skills within supportive communicative environments.

Both Vygotsky and Bruner also assign a crucial role to the teacher as a guide rather than a transmitter of knowledge. In their views effective teaching involves providing support that helps learners perform tasks they cannot complete independently. Teachers are responsible for structuring tasks, offering prompts, modeling appropriate language use and adjusting the level of support based on learners needs. This shared perspective aligns closely with scaffolding practices in EFL speaking instruction, where teachers guide learners during oral tasks and gradually reduce assistance as learners become more confident and competent (Gibbons, 2015).

The temporary nature of instructional support represents another key similarity between the two theories. Both scholars emphasize that support should be gradually withdrawn as learners gain control over the task. This process often referred to as fading, allows learners to move from assisted performance to independent language use. In EFL speaking contexts, fading is essential for helping learners transition from reliance on sentence frames or teacher prompts to spontaneous and fluent speech production (Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010).

Finally, both theories share a strong focus on learner independence as the ultimate goal of instruction, while support is necessary at early stages of learning, Vygotsky and Bruner agree that effective teaching should lead learners toward autonomy. in speaking instruction this goal is reflected in learners' ability to communicate ideas clearly, confidently and appropriately without constant guidance. Scaffolding from both perspectives serves as a bridge that enables learners to develop the skills and confidence needed for independent oral communication.

In summary, despite differences in theoretical emphasis, Vygotsky's and Bruner's theories converge on several fundamental principles, including active learning, the importance of interaction, the guiding role of the teacher, the temporary nature of support, and the promotion of learner autonomy. These shared principles provide a strong theoretical justification for the use of scaffolding in EFL speaking instruction.

2.4 Differences Between Vygotsky's and Bruner's Theories

While Vygotsky's and Bruner's theories share several foundational principles, they also differ in important ways that influence how scaffolding is understood and applied in educational contexts. Examining these differences is essential for developing a deeper and more balanced understanding of scaffolding, particularly in EFL speaking instruction, where both social interaction and instructional structure play critical roles.

One key difference between the two theories lies in their primary focus on the source of learning. Vygotsky places strong emphasis on the social and cultural dimensions of learning, viewing cognitive development as a process that emerges through interaction with others. In his perspective learning is fundamentally shaped by social relationships and knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue and shared activity/ In contrast, Bruner focuses more on the cognitive processes within the learner, emphasizing how individuals organize, process and represent knowledge through structured exploration and discovery (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1986). This difference in focus is reflected in how each theorist views the role of interaction. For Vygotsky, interaction is not simply supportive but essential for development, as learning occurs first on the social level before becoming internalized by the learner in EFL speaking classrooms. This means that peer interaction and teacher–student dialogue are central to language development. Bruner on the other hand considers interaction as a means to guide learners through cognitive discovery. While interaction remains important, it primarily serves to structure learning tasks and help learners understand how to approach problem-solving activities.

Another important distinction relates to the concept of guidance and instructional control. Vygotsky's theory emphasizes responsive and dialogic support that emerges naturally through interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development. The teacher's role is to provide assistance that is closely attuned to the learner's immediate needs, often through collaborative dialogue. Bruner's approach by contrast highlights the importance of deliberate instructional design. Teachers are expected to plan tasks carefully, sequence learning activities and control task complexity to support learners cognitive development. In speaking instruction, this may result in more structured activities, such as guided role-plays or step-by-step speaking tasks, under Bruner's framework. The two theories also differ in their treatment of learner discovery. Bruner strongly advocates discovery learning arguing that learners develop deeper understanding when

they actively explore and construct knowledge. Scaffolding in this context supports learners during the discovery process by reducing difficulty and directing attention. Vygotsky does not explicitly emphasize discovery learning; instead, he focuses on internalization through social mediation. In EFL speaking instruction, this difference suggests that Bruner's theory may encourage exploratory speaking tasks, while Vygotsky's perspective emphasizes collaborative dialogue and guided interaction.

Differences can also be observed in how the theories have been interpreted and applied in educational research. Vygotsky's theory has been widely adopted in sociocultural approaches to second language acquisition, which stress the role of interaction, collaboration and mediation in language development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Bruner's theory on the other hand, has been more influential in instructional design and curriculum development, particularly through concepts such as the spiral curriculum and structured learning progression (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Despite these differences, it is important to note that the theories are not contradictory but complementary in EFL speaking instruction. Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction helps explain how learners develop communicative competence through dialogue, while Bruner's focus on structure and discovery informs how speaking tasks can be designed and sequenced effectively. Understanding these distinctions allows teachers and researchers to draw on both perspectives when implementing scaffolding strategies that address learners' cognitive and social needs.

In summary, Vygotsky's theory prioritizes social mediation and interaction as the foundation of learning, whereas Bruner's theory emphasizes cognitive organization and structured discovery. These differences shape how scaffolding is conceptualized and applied in EFL speaking classrooms, highlighting the need for a balanced approach that integrates interaction-based support with well-planned instructional structure.

Table 2. 1: Differences Between Vigotsky's and Bruner's Theories

Aspect	Vygotsky	Bruner	Similarity / Difference
View of Learning	Learning is socially mediated and occurs through interaction	Learning is an active cognitive process guided by discovery	Similarity: Learning is active, not passive
Role of Interaction	Central and essential for cognitive development	Important as a tool to guide discovery	Similarity: Interaction supports learning
Role of the Teacher	More knowledgeable other who supports learners within the ZPD	Guide who structures tasks and controls difficulty	Similarity: Teacher acts as a facilitator
Nature of Support	Responsive and dialogic support based on learners needs	Structured and planned instructional support	Difference: Type and source of support
Focus of the Theory	Social and cultural context of learning	Cognitive organization and discovery	Difference: Theoretical emphasis
Learner Independence	Achieved through gradual internalization of social interaction	Achieved through guided discovery and practice	Similarity: Goal is learner autonomy
Application to Speaking	Emphasizes collaborative dialogue and interaction	Emphasizes structured speaking tasks and guidance	Difference: Instructional approach

2.5 Types of Scaffolding in EFL Speaking Instruction

Scaffolding in EFL speaking instruction can take multiple forms, each designed to support learners in managing the cognitive and linguistic demands of oral communication. Because speaking requires learners to produce language spontaneously and interactively, different types of scaffolding are often combined to help learners participate effectively in speaking tasks. Understanding these types allows teachers to select appropriate support strategies based on learners' proficiency levels and instructional goals.

To start with, Linguistic scaffolding focused on supporting learners' language use by providing assistance with vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and sentence structure. This type of scaffolding is particularly important in speaking instruction, as learners often struggle to express ideas due to limited linguistic resources, teachers may offer model sentences, key vocabulary lists, sentence starters, or useful expressions that learners can use during speaking activities. By

doing so, learners are better equipped to formulate responses and participate in oral interaction with greater confidence. Research suggested that linguistic scaffolding helps reduce learners anxiety and increases fluency by lowering the cognitive load associated with language production (Thornbury, 2005). When learners are given access to appropriate language forms, they can focus more on meaning and interaction rather than on searching for words. As learners become more proficient, teachers gradually withdraw this support, encouraging independent language use (Gibbons, 2015).

Secondly, Procedural scaffolding refers to the support provided to help learners understand and manage the steps involved in a speaking task. This type of scaffolding does not focus on language itself, but on how the task is organized and performed in speaking instruction. Procedural scaffolding may include explaining task instructions clearly, demonstrating how to perform the activity, setting time limits and outlining the sequence of steps learners should follow. For EFL learners, especially at lower proficiency levels, unclear task procedures can increase anxiety and hinder participation. Procedural scaffolding helps create a structured learning environment in which learners know what is expected of them and how to proceed. Accordingly, clear task organization allows learners to concentrate on language use rather than on understanding task requirements, thereby improving the effectiveness of speaking practice (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

Thirdly, conceptual scaffolding supports learners understanding of content and ideas before and during speaking activities. In many speaking tasks, learners struggle not only with language but also with organizing ideas and expressing meaningful content. Conceptual scaffolding addresses this issue by helping learners clarify key concepts, develop ideas and make logical connections. In EFL speaking classrooms, teachers may use brainstorming activities, guiding questions, graphic organizers, or visual aids to support learners thinking before speaking. This type of scaffolding enables learners to focus on conveying ideas clearly rather than generating content spontaneously. Studies indicate that conceptual support enhances learners' ability to produce coherent and meaningful speech, particularly in extended speaking tasks such as discussions or presentations (Ellis, 2008).

To add more, Metacognitive scaffolding involves supporting learners' awareness and control of their own learning processes in speaking instruction. This type of scaffolding encourages learners to plan, monitor and evaluate their oral performance. Teachers may prompt learners to

think about how they will express their ideas, reflect on their speaking strengths and weaknesses or assess their performance after completing a task. Metacognitive scaffolding helps learners become more autonomous and strategic speakers by developing awareness of their speaking processes. Learners are better able to identify areas for improvement and adjust their language use accordingly. Van de Pol, Volman and Beishuizen (2010) emphasize that metacognitive support plays a crucial role in fostering learner independence, which is a key goal of scaffolding. Peer scaffolding occurs when learners support each other through interaction and collaboration in EFL speaking instruction. Pair and group work provide opportunities for learners to exchange ideas, model language use and provide feedback. Peer scaffolding is particularly effective because learners often feel more comfortable speaking with classmates than with teachers, which can reduce anxiety and increase participation. Research shows that peer interaction facilitates language development by allowing learners to negotiate meaning and practice speaking in a supportive environment (Swain et al., 2015). Through peer scaffolding, learners can observe different language strategies, receive immediate feedback and gradually improve their speaking performance. Teachers play an important role in organizing and monitoring peer activities to ensure that interaction remains focused and productive.

In summary, scaffolding in EFL speaking instruction includes various types of support, such as linguistic, procedural, conceptual, metacognitive and peer scaffolding. Each type addresses different aspects of the speaking process and contributes to learners' ability to communicate more effectively. When used together these forms of scaffolding create a supportive learning environment that promotes fluency, accuracy, confidence and learner autonomy in speaking.

2.6 Principles of Scaffolding

Effective scaffolding in EFL speaking instruction is guided by a set of core principles that determine how support should be provided, adjusted and gradually withdrawn. These principles ensure that scaffolding functions as a dynamic and learner-centered process rather than as fixed or excessive assistance. When applied appropriately they help learners develop speaking skills while moving toward greater independence and confidence.

2.6.1 Contingency (Responsiveness)

Contingency, also referred to as responsiveness, emphasizes that instructional support must be closely aligned with learners' current level of ability and immediate needs. In speaking instruction, teachers are expected to observe learners oral performance carefully and provide support that is neither too limited nor overly controlling. For instance, when learners struggle to express ideas orally, teachers may offer prompts or guiding questions; however, as learners demonstrate increased competence, such support should be reduced, responsive scaffolding has been shown to enhance learner engagement and facilitate effective language development (Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010).

2.6.2 Instructions New Skills

It refers to the gradual withdrawal of instructional support as learners become more capable. Scaffolding is intended to be temporary, and continuous support may limit learner independence in EFL speaking classrooms. The process refers to instructions reducing the use of sentence frames, minimizing teacher intervention during discussions or allowing learners to manage speaking tasks independently. According to Gibbons (2015), the instruction of scaffolding is essential for enabling learners to internalize language skills and apply them autonomously in new communicative situations.

2.6.3 Transfer of Responsibility

The transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the learner is a central principle of scaffolding. At the early stages of learning, teachers play a dominant role by modeling language use, guiding speaking activities and structuring tasks. Over time learners are encouraged to assume greater control over their speaking performance. this gradual shift supports learner autonomy and helps students develop confidence in expressing ideas without constant teacher assistance (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

2.6.4 Dialogic Interaction

Dialogic interaction is a key principle of scaffolding, particularly in speaking instruction. Learning to speak a foreign language requires meaningful interaction in which learners can negotiate meaning, receive feedback and adjust their language use. Through dialogue, teachers

guide learners, clarify misunderstandings and encourage extended oral production. This interaction allows scaffolding to emerge naturally during communication, supporting learners as they refine their speaking skills in real time (Ellis, 2008).

2.6.5 Alignment with Learning Goals

Effective scaffolding must be aligned with instructional goals in EFL speaking instruction. Support should directly contribute to the development of fluency, accuracy and confidence. Teachers need to select scaffolding techniques based on specific speaking objectives, such as improving pronunciation, organizing ideas coherently or participating actively in discussions. When scaffolding is aligned with clear learning goals, it becomes more purposeful and leads to measurable improvement in speaking performance.

2.6.6 Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

Scaffolding should also contribute to creating a supportive and low-anxiety learning environment. Speaking in a foreign language often involves fear of making mistakes, which can reduce learners willingness to participate. By providing appropriate support and gradually reducing it, teachers create a safe space in which learners feel encouraged to take risks and experiment with language. This supportive environment plays an important role in maintaining learner motivation and engagement during speaking activities.

As concluding note on the Principles of Scaffolding, together, these principles (contingency, fading, transfer of responsibility, dialogic interaction, alignment with learning goals and emotional support), form an integrated framework for effective scaffolding in EFL speaking instruction. When applied consistently, they guide teachers in providing meaningful support while promoting learner independence and confident oral communication.

2.7 Scaffolding Strategies for Speaking

Scaffolding strategies for speaking refer to the practical techniques that teachers use to support EFL learners during oral communication tasks. While the previous section discussed the principles that guide scaffolding, this section focuses on how these principles are translated into

classroom practices. Effective speaking scaffolding strategies aim to reduce learners' anxiety, support language production and gradually develop fluency, accuracy and confidence.

One widely used scaffolding strategy in speaking instruction is modeling. Through modeling, teachers demonstrate how spoken language should be used in specific contexts, such as asking questions, expressing opinions, or participating in discussions. By listening to accurate and appropriate language models, learners gain a clearer understanding of how to structure their speech. Modeling is especially important for lower-level learners, as it provides concrete examples that they can imitate before attempting independent production (Gibbons, 2015).

Another important strategy is prompting and questioning. Teachers may use guiding questions, hints or partial sentences to encourage learners to continue speaking or clarify their ideas. Rather than correcting learners directly, prompts help them reformulate their responses and think more deeply about their language use. Research suggests that prompting supports learners engagement and helps maintain interaction during speaking activities, particularly in communicative tasks such as discussions and role plays (Ellis, 2008).

Sentence starters and language frames are also commonly used scaffolding strategies in EFL speaking classrooms. These tools provide learners with a structured linguistic framework that helps them initiate and organize spoken responses. For example, learners may be given expressions such as *"In my opinion…"* or *"I agree with this idea because…"* to support participation in discussions. Such strategies are particularly effective in reducing hesitation and increasing learners willingness to speak, especially among learners who lack confidence in their language abilities (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

Visual support represents another effective scaffolding strategy for speaking. Visual aids such as pictures, charts, diagrams and cue cards help learners generate ideas and organize their speech. Visual scaffolding reduces the cognitive load associated with speaking by supporting comprehension and memory, allowing learners to focus on oral production. Studies have shown that visual support enhances learners ability to produce more coherent and meaningful spoken language, particularly in descriptive and narrative speaking tasks (Gibbons, 2015).

Pair and group work also function as powerful scaffolding strategies for speaking. Through collaborative interaction, learners are able to support each other by sharing ideas, negotiating meaning and practicing language in a less threatening environment. peer interaction allows learners to observe different speaking strategies and receive immediate feedback from

classmates. Swain, Kinnear and Steinman (2015) argue that collaborative dialogue plays a crucial role in developing speaking skills, as it encourages learners to actively use language for communication.

Another key strategy is feedback scaffolding, which involves providing timely and supportive feedback during or after speaking tasks. Effective feedback focuses on guiding learners rather than highlighting errors excessively. Teachers may reformulate learners utterances, ask clarification questions or provide suggestions for improvement. This type of feedback helps learners notice gaps in their language use while maintaining their confidence and motivation to speak (Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010).

Finally, gradual task complexity is an essential scaffolding strategy in speaking instruction. Teachers can design speaking tasks that progress from simple to more complex forms of communication, for instance learners may begin with controlled speaking activities, such as short dialogues and gradually move toward more open-ended tasks, such as debates or presentations, this progression allows learners to build skills incrementally and prepares them for independent speaking performance.

In summary, scaffolding strategies for speaking include modeling, prompting, sentence frames, visual support, peer interaction, feedback and gradual task progression. When applied thoughtfully and in alignment with scaffolding principles, these strategies create supportive learning environments that enable EFL learners to develop speaking skills more effectively. Such practices are particularly valuable in university EFL contexts, where learners are expected to communicate confidently and independently.

Table 2. 2: Scaffolding Strategies for Speaking

Scaffolding Strategy	Description	Purpose in Speaking Instruction
Modeling	The teacher demonstrates correct and appropriate spoken language through examples and oral performance	Helps learners understand how to structure speech and use language accurately
Prompting and Questioning	The teacher uses guiding questions, hints or partial responses to encourage learners to continue speaking	Supports idea development and maintains oral interaction
Sentence Starters and Language Frames	Learners are provided with fixed expressions or sentence beginnings	Reduces hesitation and increases learners confidence in speaking
Visual Support	Use of pictures, charts, diagrams or cue cards to support speaking tasks	Helps learners generate ideas and organize spoken responses
Pair and Group Work	Learners work collaboratively in pairs or small groups	Encourages peer interaction and reduces anxiety during speaking
Feedback Scaffolding	The teacher provides supportive and timely feedback during or after speaking tasks	Guides learners toward improved fluency and accuracy without discouragement
Gradual Task Complexity	Speaking tasks progress from simple to more complex activities	Allows learners to develop speaking skills incrementally and independently

2.8 Benefits of Scaffolding

Scaffolding has been widely recognized as an effective instructional approach in EFL speaking instruction because it provides learners with the support they need to engage in oral communication while gradually developing independence. Research indicates that when scaffolding is applied appropriately, it offers multiple benefits that address both linguistic and affective aspects of speaking development, particularly in university EFL contexts.

One major benefit of scaffolding is its positive impact on speaking fluency. By providing structured support such as modeling, prompts and guided interaction, scaffolding reduces

hesitation and helps learners maintain the flow of speech. Learners are able to focus on conveying meaning rather than struggling to initiate or sustain spoken responses. Recent studies suggest that scaffolding-based instruction leads to noticeable improvement in learners oral fluency by allowing them to practice speaking in manageable stages (Teng, 2019; Sato & Ballinger, 2016). As support is gradually withdrawn, learners become more capable of producing fluent speech independently.

Scaffolding also contributes significantly to the enhancement of speaking accuracy. Through techniques such as modeling correct language use, reformulating learners utterances and providing focused feedback, scaffolding helps learners notice and correct grammatical, lexical and pronunciation errors. This guided support allows learners to refine their language use without interrupting communication. According to Ha and Nguyen (2021), supportive classroom interaction that includes scaffolded feedback improves learners control over linguistic forms while maintaining communicative engagement, which is essential for effective speaking development.

Another important benefit of scaffolding is the increase in learner confidence and willingness to speak. Speaking in a foreign language often involves anxiety and fear of making mistakes, which can limit learners participation. Scaffolding creates a supportive environment where learners feel safe to experiment with language and express ideas without excessive pressure. Research on affective factors in language learning indicates that scaffolded interaction reduces speaking anxiety and enhances learners willingness to communicate (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Teimouri, Goetze, & Plonsky, 2019). As learners experience successful speaking performances with support, their confidence gradually increases.

Another notable benefit of scaffolding is its effectiveness in mixed-ability classrooms. University EFL classes often include learners with varying levels of speaking proficiency. Scaffolding allows teachers to differentiate instruction by adjusting the level of support provided to individual learners or groups. According to Van de Pol, Mercer, and Volman (2019), adaptive scaffolding enables teachers to respond flexibly to learners needs, ensuring that all students can participate meaningfully in speaking tasks regardless of their proficiency level.

Overall, the literature indicates that scaffolding offers substantial benefits for EFL speaking instruction by improving fluency and accuracy, increasing confidence and participation, promoting learner autonomy and supporting diverse learner needs. These benefits highlight the

value of scaffolding as an effective instructional approach in university EFL classrooms and provide strong theoretical and empirical support for its use in the present study.

2.9 Challenges of Scaffolding

Despite the well-documented benefits of scaffolding in EFL speaking instruction, its effective implementation is not without challenges. These challenges do not undermine the value of scaffolding as an instructional approach; rather they highlight the practical difficulties teachers and institutions may face when applying it in real classroom contexts, particularly at the university level.

One major challenge relates to teachers instructional decision-making, effective scaffolding requires teachers to accurately assess learners current abilities and provide an appropriate level of support. However, determining when to offer assistance and when to withdraw it can be difficult, especially in speaking activities where learners performance varies rapidly. Over-scaffolding may lead to learner dependence, while under-scaffolding may result in frustration and reduced participation. Van de Pol, Mercer, and Volman (2019) note that responsive scaffolding demands high levels of pedagogical awareness and continuous monitoring of learners progress, which may be challenging for less experienced teachers.

Time constraints and classroom conditions represent another significant challenge. Speaking activities that involve scaffolding often require extended interaction, feedback and individualized support. In many university EFL contexts limited class time and large class sizes restrict teachers ability to provide adequate scaffolding for all learners. Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) argue that meaningful interaction, which is essential for scaffolding, becomes difficult to manage in crowded classrooms, reducing opportunities for individualized support during speaking tasks.

Learner-related factors also present challenges to scaffolding implementation. Some learners may become overly reliant on teacher support and struggle to develop independence in speaking. This dependency can limit the effectiveness of scaffolding, particularly when fading is not carefully managed. Additionally, differences in learners' proficiency levels, motivation and confidence may affect how they respond to scaffolded instruction. In mixed-ability classrooms teachers must balance support across diverse learner needs, which can complicate speaking instruction (Ha & Nguyen, 2021).

Another challenge concerns cognitive load, particularly when scaffolding is poorly designed. While scaffolding is intended to reduce cognitive demands, excessive or unclear support may overwhelm learners instead. Cognitive load theory suggests that learners benefit from well-structured instruction that minimizes unnecessary mental effort (Sweller, Ayres, & Kalyuga, 2019). In speaking instruction overly complex tasks or excessive prompts may distract learners from meaningful communication and hinder language development.

Institutional and contextual factors further influence the effectiveness of scaffolding. Traditional curricula that emphasize grammar instruction and examination preparation may leave limited space for scaffolded speaking activities. In addition, limited access to professional development opportunities may prevent teachers from acquiring the skills necessary to implement scaffolding effectively. Kirschner and Hendrick (2020) emphasize that instructional approaches such as scaffolding require systematic training and institutional support to be applied successfully.

In summary, the challenges of scaffolding in EFL speaking instruction include instructional decision-making difficulties, time and classroom constraints, learner-related issues, cognitive load concerns and institutional limitations. Recognizing these challenges is essential for understanding the conditions under which scaffolding can be most effective. Addressing these issues through thoughtful instructional design and teacher development can enhance the practical application of scaffolding in university EFL classrooms.

2.10 Scaffolding Effectiveness across Educational Levels

Research on scaffolding across educational levels consistently indicates that its effectiveness is closely linked to learners' cognitive development, instructional goals, and the nature of classroom interaction. While scaffolding is valuable at all stages of education, its role, intensity and outcomes vary significantly between primary, secondary and higher education contexts. Understanding these variations is essential for evaluating the relevance of scaffolding in university-level EFL speaking instruction, which is the focus of the present study.

At the primary education level, scaffolding has been shown to play a foundational role in language development. Young learners typically require high levels of explicit and continuous support, as they are still developing basic linguistic knowledge and cognitive control, studies conducted in early language learning contexts suggest that scaffolding supports learners initial engagement in speaking by providing clear models, repetition and structured interaction

(Walqui & van Lier, 2018). At this stage the effectiveness of scaffolding is strongly associated with increased participation and basic oral production rather than communicative independence. Speaking activities are often highly guided and learner autonomy remains a long-term goal rather than an immediate outcome.

In secondary education, the effectiveness of scaffolding shifts toward supporting learners transition from guided participation to more independent language use. Learners at this level generally possess greater linguistic awareness and cognitive maturity, which allows scaffolding to function more selectively. Research indicates that scaffolded speaking tasks at the secondary level contribute to improved communicative competence, particularly in discussion-based and collaborative activities (Sato & Ballinger, 2016). Scaffolding is effective when it balances support with challenge, encouraging learners to take greater responsibility for their oral performance while still benefiting from teacher guidance and peer interaction. the gradual reduction of support becomes more pronounced, reflecting learners growing capacity for self-regulation.

The effectiveness of scaffolding becomes more complex and context-dependent at the higher education level, particularly in EFL university settings. University learners are expected to engage in advanced speaking tasks such as academic discussions, presentations and argumentation. Studies in tertiary education contexts suggest that scaffolding remains effective, but only when it is carefully adapted to learners academic and communicative needs (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Unlike earlier stages, university students often resist overt or excessive scaffolding, perceiving it as limiting their autonomy. as a result, scaffolding at this level tends to be more subtle, strategic and dialogic.

Recent research highlights that scaffolding in higher education is most effective when it supports academic speaking practices rather than basic language production. Teng (2019) found that scaffolded instruction in university EFL classrooms significantly improved learners ability to organize ideas, maintain coherence and express critical viewpoints during speaking tasks. This suggests that the effectiveness of scaffolding at the tertiary level lies not in constant support, but in targeted interventions that enhance higher-order speaking skills. Fading and transfer of responsibility are therefore central to successful scaffolding in this context.

Across educational levels, one consistent finding is that scaffolding is most effective when it aligns with learners developmental stage and instructional objectives. While primary education

emphasizes participation and exposure, secondary education focuses on communicative growth and higher education prioritizes autonomy and academic competence. Van de Pol, Mercer and Volman (2019) argue that scaffolding should be viewed as a flexible instructional framework rather than a fixed method, with its effectiveness determined by how well it responds to contextual demands.

In summary, the effectiveness of scaffolding varies across educational levels in terms of purpose, intensity and outcomes. Although scaffolding is universally beneficial, its role evolves from providing strong guidance in early education to offering strategic and adaptive support in higher education. These findings underscore the importance of examining scaffolding specifically within university EFL speaking contexts, where learners needs, expectations and communicative demands differ significantly from those at earlier educational stages.

2.11 Results of Previous Research on scaffolding

This section provided a summary of the most important empirical findings from previous research on instructional support in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching contexts, with particular emphasis on speaking skills instruction. The findings have been organized thematically to highlight common patterns, consistent results and areas of variation reported in the literature.

2.11.1 Findings on Speaking Performance and Fluency

A considerable number of empirical studies report that scaffolding has a positive effect on learners speaking performance, particularly in terms of fluency and coherence. Research indicates that structured support, such as modeling, guided practice and staged speaking tasks, enables learners to sustain oral production and organize ideas more effectively. Teng (2019) found that university EFL students exposed to scaffolded speaking instruction showed noticeable improvement in oral organization and interaction compared to learners taught through traditional approaches. Similarly (Sato & Ballinger, 2016) reported that scaffolded peer interaction contributed to improved conversational flow and greater engagement during speaking activities.

These findings suggested that scaffolding facilitates fluency by reducing the cognitive demands associated with spontaneous speech production. When learners are supported during the initial stages of speaking tasks, they are better able to focus on meaning and interaction, which leads to more fluent oral performance over time.

2.11.2 Findings on Learners Confidence and Willingness to Speak

Another major theme in the literature concerns the impact of scaffolding on learners affective factors, particularly confidence and willingness to communicate. Several studies emphasize that scaffolding creates a supportive learning environment that reduces speaking anxiety and encourages learners to participate more actively in oral communication. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) highlight that supportive classroom interaction plays a crucial role in increasing learners willingness to speak, while Teimouri, Goetze and Plonsky (2019) provide evidence that reduced anxiety is associated with improved oral performance.

These findings indicated that scaffolding contributes not only to linguistic development but also to learners' psychological readiness to engage in speaking activities, which is essential for sustained participation in EFL classrooms.

2.11.3 Findings on Classroom Interaction

Research findings consistently show that scaffolding enhances the quality of classroom interaction in EFL speaking instruction. Classroom-based studies reveal that scaffolded questioning, feedback and collaborative tasks promote more meaningful dialogue between teachers and students, as well as among peers. Derakhshan et al. (2021) found that teachers who employed scaffolded interaction strategies were able to sustain student engagement and encourage extended oral responses during speaking tasks.

These findings supported sociocultural views of language learning, which emphasize interaction as a key mechanism for language development. Scaffolding in this sense functions as a tool that shapes and guides classroom interaction toward more productive communicative outcomes.

2.11.4 Findings on Teachers Instructional Practices

With regarded to instructional practices, research suggests that the effectiveness of scaffolding largely depends on teachers ability to adapt support to learners needs, Van de Pol, Mercer and Volman (2019) argue that adaptive scaffolding (characterized by responsiveness and gradual fading) leads to better learning outcomes than fixed or rigid forms of support. Studies also indicate, however, that teachers vary considerably in their implementation of scaffolding strategies, often due to differences in experience, training and contextual constraints.

These findings highlight that scaffolding is not a uniform practice, but rather a skill that requires pedagogical awareness and continuous adjustment during speaking instruction.

2.11.5 Mixed Findings in Previous Research

Despite the generally positive findings, the literature also reported mixed or inconclusive results regarding the effectiveness of scaffolding. Some studies suggested that scaffolding does not lead to significant improvement in speaking performance when it is poorly aligned with task objectives or learner proficiency levels. Over-scaffolding, in particular has been associated with learner dependency and reduced autonomy (Kirschner & Hendrick, 2020).

These mixed findings indicated that scaffolding should not be viewed as an automatic solution, but as an instructional approach whose effectiveness depends on thoughtful design, appropriate fading and contextual suitability.

Overall, previous research demonstrated that scaffolding can significantly support EFL speaking development by improving fluency, enhancing confidence and promoting meaningful interaction. At the same time the literature underscores that its effectiveness is influenced by instructional practices and contextual factors. These findings provide a strong empirical foundation for the present study and support the need to further examine scaffolding strategies in specific university EFL contexts.

2.12 Gap in the Literature

Although scaffolding has been extensively discussed in educational and language learning research, a closer examination of the literature reveals several important gaps that justify the need for further investigation, particularly in relation to EFL speaking instruction at the university level. Existing studies provide valuable insights into the theoretical foundations and general benefits of scaffolding; however, they do not fully address the contextual, methodological and pedagogical dimensions relevant to the present study.

One significant gap in the literature is contextual, the majority of empirical research on scaffolding in language learning has been conducted in Western or Asian educational contexts, with relatively limited attention given to North African or Libyan higher education settings. While studies by Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) and Van de Pol, Mercer and Volman (2019) offer comprehensive perspectives on classroom interaction and scaffolding, their findings are largely based on contexts that differ culturally, institutionally and pedagogically from Libyan universities. As a result, there is insufficient evidence on how scaffolding operates within Libyan EFL classrooms, particularly at the University of Sabratha.

A second gap relates to the specific language skill under investigation. Much of the existing research on scaffolding in EFL has focused on reading comprehension and writing development, where structured support is more easily implemented and measured. In contrast, fewer studies have examined scaffolding in relation to speaking skills, which involve spontaneous language production, real-time interaction and affective factors such as anxiety and confidence, Although some recent studies have explored scaffolded oral interaction (e.g., Teng, 2019; Sato & Ballinger, 2016), speaking remains underrepresented compared to other language skills, especially in university-level EFL contexts.

Another important gap concerns research perspectives, many studies investigate scaffolding either from the teachers point of view, focusing on instructional practices or from students perspectives, emphasizing perceptions and learning outcomes. However, there is a lack of research that integrates both perspectives within a single study. Ha and Nguyen (2021) argue that understanding classroom interaction requires examining how instructional strategies are both implemented by teachers and experienced by learners. The absence of dual-perspective studies limits the depth of understanding regarding how scaffolding strategies function in real speaking classrooms.

In addition, a clear methodological gap can be identified in the literature. Previous research on scaffolding often relies on either quantitative methods, such as questionnaires and test scores or qualitative approaches, such as classroom observations and interviews. While each approach provides valuable insights, fewer studies adopt a mixed-methods design that combines both quantitative and qualitative data to offer a more comprehensive understanding of scaffolding effectiveness. Given the complex nature of speaking instruction and classroom interaction, the lack of mixed-methods research represents a notable limitation in existing studies.

Furthermore, there is a level-specific gap in relation to higher education. A substantial portion of scaffolding research has been conducted at the primary and secondary levels, where learners require continuous and explicit support. Although some scholars have addressed scaffolding in tertiary education, these studies often focus on general academic skills rather than EFL speaking specifically (Walqui & van Lier, 2018). Consequently, limited attention has been given to how scaffolding strategies can be adapted to meet the needs of university EFL learners, who are expected to demonstrate greater autonomy and engage in academic speaking tasks.

Taken together, these gaps indicated a clear need for research that examines scaffolding strategies in EFL speaking instruction within a Libyan university context, integrates both teachers and students perspectives and employs a mixed-methods approach. Addressing these gaps not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge but also provides practical insights for improving speaking instruction in higher education. The present study seeks to respond directly to these gaps by exploring scaffolding practices at the University of Sabratha and examining their perceived impact on students speaking development.

Table 2. 3: Gap in the Literature

Type of Gap	Key Previous Studies	Focus of the Studies	Identified Limitation / Gap	Contribution of the Present Study
Contextual Gap	Mercer & Dörnyei (2020); Van de Pol, Mercer, & Volman (2019)	Classroom interaction and scaffolding in European contexts	Lack of studies conducted in Libyan or North African university EFL contexts	Examines scaffolding practices in a Libyan university (University of Sabratha)
Skill-Specific Gap	Walqui & van Lier (2018);	Scaffolding for academic literacy, mainly reading and writing	Limited focus on speaking skills, especially spontaneous oral communication	Focuses specifically on scaffolding strategies for EFL speaking
Perspective Gap	Gibbons (2015); Teng (2019)	Teacher-led scaffolding or learner outcomes separately	Few studies integrate both teachers and students perspectives	Investigates scaffolding from both teachers' and students' viewpoints
Methodological Gap	Sato & Ballinger (2016); Derakhshan et al. (2021)	Qualitative classroom interaction or quantitative performance measures	Limited use of mixed-methods designs in scaffolding research	Employs a mixed-methods approach combining questionnaires and interviews
Level-Specific Gap	Walqui & van Lier (2018); Benson (2021)	Scaffolding across educational stages, with emphasis on school levels	Insufficient attention to university-level EFL speaking instruction	Focuses on tertiary-level EFL learners and academic speaking contexts

2.13 Summary of the Chapter

To sum up, a comprehensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature related to scaffolding in EFL speaking instruction has been presented, establishing a solid foundation for the present study. It began by clarifying the concept of scaffolding as a dynamic and temporary form of instructional support that enables learners to perform speaking tasks beyond their current level, with the aim of fostering independent oral communication.

Attention was then given to the theoretical foundations of scaffolding through the perspectives of Vygotsky and Bruner. Their contributions highlighted the central role of social interaction, guided support and cognitive development in language learning. By examining both similarities and differences between these theories, a balanced understanding of scaffolding as a concept grounded in sociocultural and cognitive traditions was established.

The discussion also addressed the pedagogical application of scaffolding in EFL speaking classrooms, focusing on its types, guiding principles and instructional strategies. These elements illustrated how different forms of support can be systematically employed to enhance learners fluency, accuracy and confidence while gradually promoting learner autonomy.

Empirical research reviewed in this section demonstrated that scaffolding offers substantial benefits for speaking development, including improved oral performance, increased participation and reduced speaking anxiety. At the same time several challenges associated with its implementation were identified, along with variations in effectiveness across educational levels, These findings emphasized that successful scaffolding depends on contextual factors, teacher expertise and learners readiness for independent performance.

Furthermore, a clear gap in the existing literature was identified, particularly in relation to university-level EFL speaking instruction. The Libyan higher education context and studies that integrate both teachers and students perspectives through mixed-methods approaches. Addressing these gaps provided a strong justification for the current research.

Overall, the reviewed literature has established a coherent conceptual and empirical framework for examining scaffolding strategies in EFL speaking instruction. The following chapter outlines the research methodology adopted to investigate these strategies and explore their application within the context of the present study.

Chapter Three
Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter serves as the structural backbone of the research, investigating the research problem by detailing the core framework—including the research design, target population, sampling methods, data collection tools, and data analysis procedures. Beyond acting as a step-by-step blueprint, this chapter critically would justify *why* the chosen methods are the most suitable and effective approach for addressing the current research questions.

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire distributed to undergraduate students of English as a Foreign Language, while qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers. The use of both methods enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of instructional support in developing students speaking skills. The quantitative data provided measurable trends, while the qualitative data offered deeper insights into teachers practices and classroom experiences.

The study employed a Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Research Design, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same period, analyzed separately and then compared and integrated. This design was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to benefit from the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches at the same time. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) noted, mixed methods research provided a more complete understanding of the research problem than using a single method alone.

In the quantitative component, a closed-ended questionnaire was administered to a group of undergraduate English students to collect numerical data about their perceptions of scaffolding in speaking skill development. In the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were conducted with EFL teachers to explore their experiences and the scaffolding strategies they used in their classrooms. Collecting both types of data concurrently helped in triangulating the

findings and increased the credibility of the results. The study was conducted at the University of Sabratha, Data collection began in October 2025, which was the beginning of the academic year when students and teachers were actively engaged in speaking lessons and activities. The entire research process, including data collection, analysis and reporting, took approximately six months and was completed by the end of 2025.

3.2 Setting, Population and Sample of the Study

3.2.1 Setting of the Study

The study was conducted at the University of Sabratha, which is one of the higher education institutions in Libya where English is taught as a foreign language. The university provided an appropriate academic environment for conducting this research, as it included departments that specialized in English language teaching and learning. The focus of the study was placed on undergraduate English language programs, where students regularly engaged in speaking courses that required interaction, communication and the use of various instructional strategies, including scaffolding.

3.2.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of undergraduate English language students and EFL teachers at the University of Sabratha during the academic year. The student population included learners enrolled in Bachelor's degree programs in the English Department at Sabratha University. These students studied English as a foreign language and participated in speaking courses as part of their academic programs. It focused specifically on fourth-year undergraduate students, as they had completed most of their language courses and gained sufficient experience with speaking activities and classroom interaction. This made them more capable of evaluating the role of scaffolding strategies in supporting their speaking skill development. In addition to the students, English language teachers at the same university formed the second part of the study population, as they were directly responsible for implementing scaffolding in speaking classrooms.

3.2.3 Sample of the Study

The following section outlines the sample selected for both the quantitative and qualitative components of this study. It details the participant characteristics, sample sizes, and sampling strategies applied to gather balanced insights from both students and teachers at Sabratha University. By combining these distinct groups, the research ensures a comprehensive evaluation of how scaffolding impacts English speaking skill development.

1. **Student Sample (Quantitative Component)**

The student sample consisted of 67 fourth-year undergraduate EFL students from the English Department at Sabratha University. Both male and female students were included to ensure a more comprehensive representation of the student population. A random sampling technique was used in selecting the student participants to give all eligible students an equal chance to participate and to increase the objectivity and generalizability of the findings.

2. **Teacher Sample (Qualitative Component)**

The qualitative sample consisted of approximately nine EFL teachers who taught English speaking courses or were involved in supporting students speaking skill development. These participants were selected using convenience sampling, which is a form of purposive sampling that focused on teachers who were available, willing to participate and directly involved in the research context. This sampling method was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to obtain rich, detailed and experience-based insights from teachers who actively practiced scaffolding in their classrooms.

3.3 Research Instruments

The study used two main research instruments in order to collect both quantitative and qualitative data: a closed-ended questionnaire for students and semi-structured interviews for teachers. Using these two instruments helped the researcher collect broad numerical data as well as rich descriptive information, which supported the mixed methods design of the study.

3.3.1 Student Questionnaire (Quantitative Instrument)

A closed-ended questionnaire was designed and administered to undergraduate EFL students to collect quantitative data about their perceptions of scaffolding in speaking skill development.

The questionnaire consisted of structured items that were organized into different sections related to students experiences, attitudes and evaluations of scaffolding strategies used in their speaking classes. It was chosen because it allowed standardised data collection from a relatively large group of students within a short period of time. This instrument also made it possible to analyze students' responses statistically and identify general trends and patterns in their perceptions. The questionnaire items were written in clear and simple English to ensure that students understood them easily and could respond accurately. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure students' responses, ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. This scale was appropriate because it enabled students to express different levels of agreement and provided more detailed and meaningful data for analysis.

3.3.2 Teacher Interviews (Qualitative Instrument)

To gather qualitative insights from teachers, the study utilised semi-structured interviews designed to capture detailed classroom perspectives. This format provided the balance needed to address specific research questions while allowing participants to elaborate freely on their instructional practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with EFL teachers to collect qualitative data about their experiences, practices and views regarding the use of scaffolding in developing students speaking skills. The interviews included a set of guiding questions, but at the same time allowed flexibility for further discussion whenever necessary. This structure helped the researcher explore teachers perspectives in depth while still keeping the conversation focused on the main research topic.

Interviews were chosen because they provided an opportunity to understand teachers' real classroom practices, the types of scaffolding strategies they used and the challenges they faced when supporting students speaking skill development. According to Jamshed (2014), interviews enable researchers to gain deep insights into participants experiences, thoughts and professional judgments, which made them highly suitable for the qualitative part of this study. The interviews were conducted individually with each teacher and were documented through careful note-taking to ensure accuracy and reliability of the collected data. The information obtained from the interviews added depth and context to the quantitative findings and contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of scaffolding in speaking classrooms.

3.4 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the research instruments was an essential step in this study, as it helped guarantee that the tools accurately measured what they were intended to measure and that the collected data were trustworthy and dependable.

3.4.1 Validity of the Instruments

The validity of the questionnaire and interview questions was established through expert review and careful design. Face validity and content validity were considered in this process. The initial versions of the questionnaire and interview guide were reviewed by specialists in English language teaching and applied linguistics to evaluate the clarity, relevance and suitability of the items in relation to the objectives and research questions of the study. Based on their feedback, necessary modifications were made to improve wording, organization and alignment with the constructs being measured.

In addition, relevant literature and previous studies related to scaffolding and speaking skills were consulted when designing the instruments, which supported the content validity of the tools. This ensured that the questionnaire items and interview questions covered the main aspects of scaffolding and reflected concepts discussed in the theoretical framework.

A pilot study was conducted with a small group of students and teachers who were not part of the main sample. The purpose of this pilot test was to check the clarity of the questionnaire items, the suitability of the interview questions and to identify any ambiguous or confusing statements. Feedback from the pilot study was used to make final adjustments, ensuring that the instruments were clear, understandable and appropriate for the target participants.

3.4.2 Reliability of the Questionnaire

The reliability of the questionnaire was examined to determine the internal consistency of its items. The reliability coefficient was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, which is widely used in educational and social science research to measure how well the items in a questionnaire measure the same underlying construct. According to Cronbach (1951), it is an effective indicator of internal consistency, while Tavakol and Dennick (2011) suggested that a value of 0.70 or above is generally considered acceptable for research purposes.

The calculated reliability coefficient showed that the questionnaire had an acceptable level of reliability, indicating that the items were consistent and suitable for measuring students' perceptions of scaffolding in speaking skill development. Therefore, the questionnaire was considered reliable for the quantitative part of the study.

3.4.3 Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Data

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data collected from teacher interviews, several strategies were applied. Credibility was enhanced by carefully designing the interview questions to align with the research objectives and by conducting interviews with teachers who had direct experience in teaching speaking. Dependability was supported through systematic data collection and clear documentation of the research procedures.

Triangulation was achieved by combining quantitative data from students with qualitative insights from teachers, which strengthened the overall interpretation of the findings. In addition, careful note-taking and accurate recording of teachers' responses helped ensure that the qualitative data were authentic and dependable.

3.5 Pilot Study

Researchers need to pilot their studies before collecting data which assist them to find out any misunderstanding, difficult words or ambiguous structures. Piloting research instruments is another significant procedure for increasing its validity and reliability (Cohen et al., 2007; Bryman, 2008). It is often a smaller-sized study assisting in planning and modification of the main study. According to Abdul-Rahman (2011), conducting a pilot study can detect the weakness of outlining the research and can refine research tools and procedures. Moreover, Junyong (2017) clarified that pilot study validates the practicality of the study by assessing the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the participants and testing of the instruments used for measurements in the study.

The designed interview questions for EFL teachers were examined with three instructors before conducting the actual interview to test the reliability of the questions. It was checked in two ways: to what extent the questions met the research questions to be explored and the clarity, and feasibility of the stated points in the interview questions to be discussed with instructors. To exemplify, two interview questions were modified due to the similarity between two points.

Questionnaire items were assessed by the supervisor, colleagues and fifteen students from third year at the English major before the distribution of the questionnaire. The linguistic structure was modified and words were simplified to meet students' understanding of the targeted items in the questionnaire.

3.6 Procedures of Data Collection

The procedures of the study were carried out through several organized and systematic steps to ensure accurate and reliable data collection. These procedures were planned carefully to match the mixed methods research design and to address the research questions effectively.

First, the research instruments were prepared based on the literature review and the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapters. The questionnaire items and interview questions were drafted in alignment with the study objectives. After that, the instruments were reviewed by experts to ensure validity and the necessary modifications were made according to their suggestions. Apilot study was conducted to further refine and confirm the suitability of both instruments before their final use.

Second, the quantitative data collection process was carried out by administering the questionnaire to 67 fourth-year undergraduate EFL students from the English Department at the University of Sabratha. The questionnaire was distributed in paper-based form during regular class time to ensure that students completed it under similar conditions. The purpose of the study was explained to the students and they were informed that participation was voluntary and that their responses would remain anonymous. After completion, the questionnaires were collected and carefully reviewed to ensure completeness and accuracy of the data.

Third, the qualitative data collection process was conducted through individual semi-structured interviews with 9 EFL teachers who taught or were involved in developing students speaking skills. The interviews were guided by a set of pre-prepared questions, while allowing flexible discussion whenever necessary to explore key ideas in greater depth. Each interview was documented through detailed note-taking to ensure accurate recording of the teachers' responses.

After completing both the questionnaire and interviews, all collected data were organized and prepared for analysis. The quantitative data were coded numerically, while the qualitative responses were arranged systematically to facilitate thematic analysis. These procedures ensured that the study followed a clear and structured research process.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis was carried out in a way that matched the mixed methods design of the study. Since the research included both quantitative and qualitative components, two different but complementary methods of analysis were used. The purpose of the analysis was to answer the research questions clearly and to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of scaffolding in developing students' speaking skills.

3.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis Procedures

The quantitative data collected from the student questionnaire were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). After the questionnaires were collected, the responses were coded numerically based on the five-point Likert scale. The data were then entered into SPSS for statistical processing.

Descriptive statistical methods were used to analyze the data. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to show the distribution of students' responses to each questionnaire item. In addition, means and standard deviations were computed to identify the overall tendency of students' perceptions and the level of agreement regarding the effectiveness of scaffolding in developing their speaking skills. These statistical techniques helped the researcher understand general trends, patterns and levels of agreement among the participants.

The results of the quantitative analysis were presented in tables to make them clear and easy to interpret. These results provided measurable evidence about students' attitudes toward scaffolding in speaking classrooms.

3.7.2 Qualitative Data Analysis Procedures

The qualitative data collected from teachers semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to identify, analyze and interpret meaningful patterns (themes) within the qualitative data. The analysis followed the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2021).

First, the researcher became familiar with the data by carefully reading the interview notes several times. Second, initial codes were generated by highlighting important ideas, repeated points and key expressions related to scaffolding practices, challenges and perceptions. Third, the codes were grouped into potential themes that represented broader ideas and relationships

within the data. These themes were then reviewed, refined and clearly defined to ensure that they accurately reflected the teachers' real experiences and viewpoints.

The final themes were described in detail and supported by evidence from the interview data. The qualitative findings added depth to the quantitative results by explaining how scaffolding was actually practiced in the classroom and what challenges teachers faced while supporting students speaking development.

3.7.3 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

After completing both analyses, the quantitative and qualitative findings were compared and integrated in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This process helped strengthen the study through triangulation, as the numerical trends from the questionnaire were supported and explained by the detailed insights obtained from teacher interviews. Both types of data contributed to producing well-rounded and credible conclusions.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the entire research process to ensure that the study was conducted in a responsible and respectful manner. The rights, dignity and well-being of all participants were carefully protected during data collection and handling.

Before administering the questionnaire and conducting the interviews, the purpose of the study was clearly explained to all participants. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and they had the right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. This ensured that participation was based on informed consent.

Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used only for academic and research purposes. No personal identifying information was collected and all data were handled anonymously to protect participants identities. The collected data were stored securely and were not shared with any individuals outside the scope of the study.

In addition, academic honesty and integrity were maintained throughout the research. All sources and previous studies that were used to support the research were acknowledged properly using the APA referencing system. By following these ethical procedures, the study ensured respect for participants rights and enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the research.

3.9 Summary of the Chapter

The study followed a Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods design, combining a closed-ended questionnaire administered to 67 fourth-year EFL students and semi-structured interviews with 9 EFL teachers. Both instruments were validated by subject-matter experts, and a pilot study was carried out before final data collection. Reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha, while the trustworthiness of the interview data was supported through triangulation and systematic documentation.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics used to identify general trends in students' responses. The qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) framework, producing themes that captured the real experiences and views of the teachers interviewed. The two sets of findings were then compared and integrated to strengthen the overall conclusions.

Throughout the process, ethical guidelines were observed: participation was voluntary, anonymity was maintained, and all referenced sources were cited according to APA conventions. The next chapter presents the results of both analyses and discusses what they reveal about the role of scaffolding in EFL speaking development.

Chapter Four
Data Analysis and Discussion

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the data collected to answer the research questions regarding the use of scaffolding strategies in EFL speaking classes at Sabratha University. Following the mixed-methods research design outlined in Chapter Three, the findings are organized into two main sections to provide a comprehensive analysis of the topic.

4.1 Quantitative Results

First, the quantitative results obtained from the questionnaire administered to 67 undergraduate EFL students are presented using descriptive statistics to explore their perceptions of the scaffolding strategies used by their teachers. Second, the qualitative findings derived from semi-structured interviews with 9 EFL teachers are analyzed thematically to provide a deeper understanding of their instructional practices and the challenges they encounter.

Before proceeding with the analysis of the quantitative data, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability coefficient for the ten items was found to be (0.85), indicating a high level of reliability and confirming that the instrument is highly suitable for measuring students' perceptions of scaffolding strategies.

To investigate these perceptions in detail, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated and provided a more structured and theoretically grounded analysis, The questionnaire items were grouped into three distinct categories based on the types of scaffolding discussed in the literature review (Chapter Two), these categories are:

1. Procedural Scaffolding Strategies: (Items 1, 2 and 6).
2. Interactional and Linguistic Scaffolding Strategies: (Items 3, 4, 5 and 10).
3. Modeling and Visual Scaffolding Strategies: (Items 7, 8, and 9).

.

Table 4. 1: Questionnaire Results

	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	My teacher provides clear directions to help me perform speaking activities	44.78%	38.81%	7.46%	2.99%	4.48%
2	My teacher explains speaking tasks in detail so I clearly understand what to do	35.82%	31.34%	22.39%	8.96%	1.49%
3	My teacher offers assistance when I face difficulties during speaking tasks	20.90%	41.79%	31.34%	2.99%	2.99%
4	My teacher uses guiding or leading questions to help me complete speaking activities successfully	19.40%	38.81%	26.87%	8.96%	5.97%
5	My teacher gives constructive feedback to help me improve my speaking skill	35.82%	34.33%	14.93%	10.45%	4.48%
6	My teacher repeats or reformulates speaking tasks or instructions when necessary to help me understand better	28.36%	34.33%	28.36%	8.96%	0.00%
7	My teacher provides speaking models or examples that motivate me to participate in speaking activities	16.42%	50.75%	22.39%	8.96%	1.49%
8	My teacher demonstrates how to perform speaking tasks before asking us to do them	26.87%	28.36%	26.87%	14.93%	2.99%
9	My teacher uses videos, readings, mind maps, or visual aids to support my speaking performance	28.36%	26.87%	26.87%	11.94%	5.97%
10	My teacher designs speaking activities that are appropriate for my level and help me express my ideas creatively	31.34%	34.33%	23.88%	8.96%	1.49%

Table 4.1 presents the quantitative findings regarding students' perceptions of teacher support during speaking activities across ten distinct questionnaire items. Overall, the data reveals a strong positive response from participants regarding instructional guidance in the classroom. A significant majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their teachers provide clear directions (83.59%) and detailed task explanations (67.16%). Additionally, instructional strategies such as offering assistance during difficulties, using guiding questions, and providing constructive feedback received substantial agreement, each exceeding 50% combined support. Responses also highlight the positive impact of pedagogical tools, as most students agreed that teachers effectively use speaking models, demonstrations, visual aids, and level-appropriate activity designs. Neutral responses remained relatively low to moderate across all items, ranging between 7.46% and 31.34%. Furthermore, disagreement levels were consistently low, with strongly disagree ratings remaining under 6% for every statement. In conclusion, these findings demonstrate that students generally hold favorable attitudes toward their teachers' instructional support and scaffolding techniques in developing speaking skills.

The following subsections present and interpret the findings for each of these categories in detail.

4.1.1 Procedural Scaffolding Strategies

The first category of the questionnaire investigated students' perceptions of procedural scaffolding, which refers to the support teachers provide to help students understand and manage the steps involved in a speaking task. The descriptive statistics for this category (Items 1, 2 and 6) reveal a strong agreement among students regarding their teachers use of these strategies.

Table 4. 2: Procedural Scaffolding Strategies

Item-ID	Mean	Std. Deviation
Item (1)	1.81	01.02
Item (2)	02.08	01.04
Item (6)	2.17	0.95

Notably, (Item 1) “My teacher provides clear directions to help me perform speaking activities” recorded the highest level of agreement across the entire questionnaire, with a mean score of

(1.81) and a standard deviation of (1.02). Similarly, students agreed that their teachers explain speaking tasks in detail (Item 2, M = 2.08, SD = 1.04) and repeat or reformulate instructions when necessary to ensure better understanding (Item 6, M = 2.17, SD = 0.95).

These results indicated that EFL teachers at Sabratha University heavily rely on procedural scaffolding before initiating speaking tasks. By providing clear directions and detailed explanations, teachers create a highly structured learning environment. As highlighted in the literature review, this type of scaffolding is crucial for EFL learners because it reduces the anxiety associated with unclear task requirements, allowing students to concentrate on language production rather than struggling to understand what is expected of them.

This strong reliance on procedural scaffolding can be directly attributed to the specific EFL learning environment in Libya and at Sabratha University in particular. As noted previously, students in this context have very limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Furthermore, their prior educational background often emphasizes traditional grammar and reading instructions rather than communicative oral practice. Consequently, undergraduate learners frequently experience high levels of speaking anxiety and a fear of making mistakes. In such a setting, providing crystal-clear, detailed and repeated instructions is not merely a classroom management tool, but a psychological and cognitive necessity. According to Hammond (2014), clear task organization allows learners to concentrate on language use rather than struggling with task requirements. By doing so teachers successfully lower the students affective filter, creating a safe and predictable environment that encourages them to take the risk of speaking.

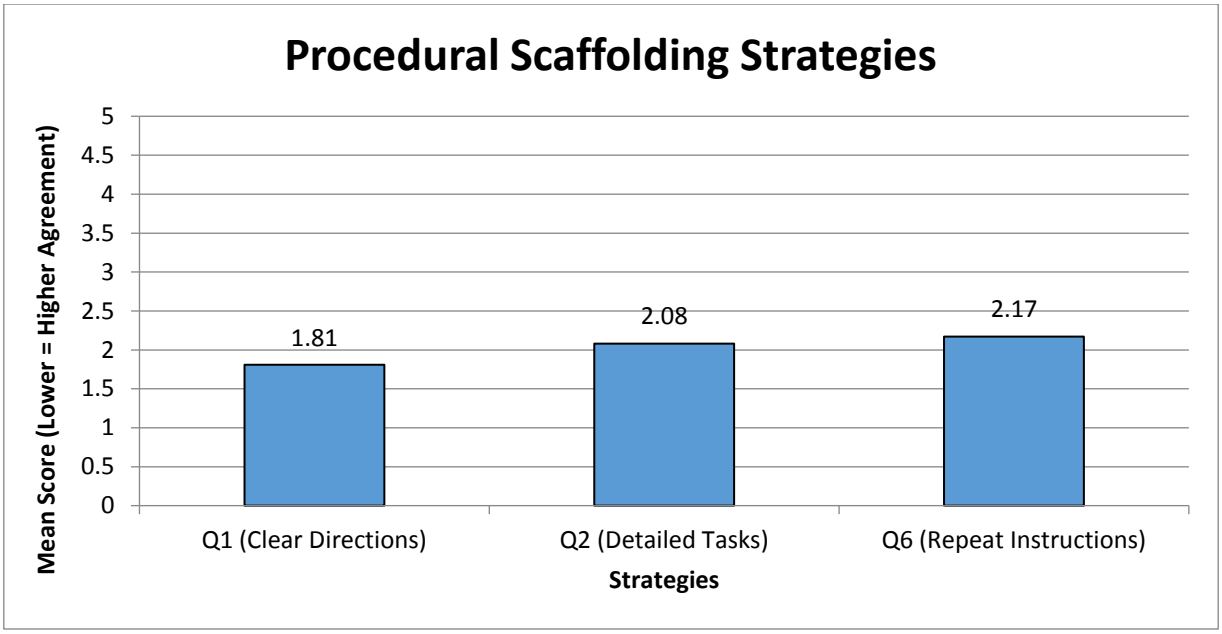


Figure 4. 1: Procedural Scaffolding Strategies

The findings of this study show that undergraduate EFL learners strongly agree on the importance of their teachers using procedural scaffolding during speaking activities. Goh (2017) discussed that the high average scores for clear directions, detailed task explanations, and repeating instructions align with previous research showing that procedural support is essential in foreign language learning. In environments where students have few opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, unclear instructions often lead to confusion and anxiety as mentioned by Wood et al. (1976). According to Levelt's (1989) speech production model, speaking requires students to generate ideas, form sentences, and pronounce words at the same time. When teachers provide clear, step-by-step instructions before a speaking task, Razaghi et al. (2019) explained that they remove the confusion of what to do, allowing students to focus their limited mental energy on producing language instead of figuring out the instructions.

In addition, the focus on clear instructions at Sabratha University shows that scaffolding helps students both cognitively and emotionally. In traditional classrooms that focus mainly on grammar rules rather than spoken communication, speaking anxiety often stops students from participating (Razaghi et al., 2019). By giving structured, repeated directions, teachers help lower student anxiety and reduce the fear of making mistakes in front of others (Wood et al., 1976). These results support Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). When teachers offer clear boundaries and structured guidance,

students can move comfortably from teacher-guided support toward independent and confident speaking performance

4.1.2 Interactional and Linguistic Scaffolding Strategies

The second category investigated the extent to which teachers employ interactional and linguistic support to help students negotiate meaning and overcome difficulties during speaking tasks.

Table 4. 3: Interactional and Linguistic Scaffolding Strategies

Item ID	Mean	Standard Deviation
Item 3	2.25	0.92
Item 4	2.43	1.09
Item 5	2.13	1.15
Item 10	2.14	1.01

The findings indicated that constructive feedback (Item 5) is the most frequently perceived strategy within this group (M = 2.13, SD = 1.15), followed by teachers' efforts to design speaking activities appropriate for the students' language level (Item 10, M = 2.14, SD = 1.01). Furthermore, students acknowledged that their teachers offer assistance when they face difficulties during speaking tasks (Item 3, M = 2.25, SD = 0.92). However, a significant finding in this category is related to (Item 4) “My teacher uses guiding or leading questions to help me complete speaking activities successfully”. This item recorded the highest mean score across the entire questionnaire (M = 2.43, SD = 1.09), indicating that students perceive guiding questions as the least utilized scaffolding strategy by their teachers.

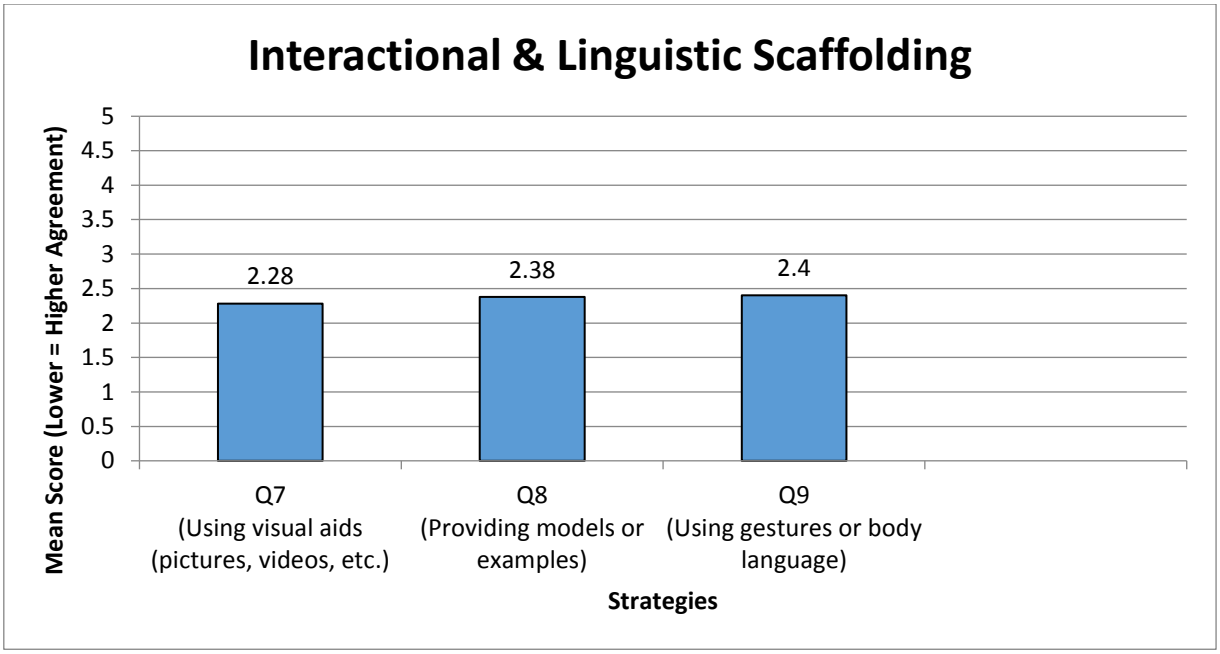


Figure 4. **2**: Interactional and Linguistic Scaffolding Strategies

The lower frequency of using guiding questions (Item 4) could be attributed to the specific constraints of the EFL context at Sabratha University. In large classes with limited lecture time, teachers may find it more efficient to provide direct feedback (Item 5) or immediate assistance (Item 3) rather than spending considerable time scaffolding a single student's response through a series of leading questions. Furthermore, as students in this environment often suffer from high speaking anxiety, teachers might avoid persistent questioning to prevent causing further embarrassment or pressure on the student in front of their peers.

The results regarding interactional and linguistic scaffolding reveal a distinct pattern in how teachers support students during speaking tasks. While students report that teachers regularly provide constructive feedback, offer direct help during difficulties, and design level-appropriate activities, guiding questions (Item 4) received the highest mean score, indicating it is the least utilized strategy. Walqui (2006) observed that this limited reliance on guiding questions reflects common structural challenges in foreign language classrooms. In a related study, Nassaji and Wells (2000) found that in environments with large class sizes and restricted contact hours, teachers often default to direct intervention—such as offering immediate answers or explicit corrections—rather than engaging in lengthy, interactive questioning sequences. Furthermore, Mercer (2019) argued that although guiding questions encourage deeper cognitive processing,

they demand substantial one-on-one interaction time that is frequently unfeasible in crowded tertiary EFL settings.

In addition, affective and cultural factors within the local learning context help account for the underutilization of guiding questions. MacIntyre (2017) emphasized that foreign language speaking anxiety often leads students to view direct questioning by the teacher as an intimidating experience rather than a supportive dialogue. Building on this idea, Horwitz (2010) demonstrated that when teachers ask continuous follow-up questions, anxious learners frequently feel put on the spot, which heightens their fear of making errors in front of peers. Consequently, Swain (2000) noted that teachers often prioritize direct assistance, visual aids, and modeling to protect students' self-esteem while maintaining lesson flow. Ultimately, Gibbons (2015) highlighted that effective pedagogical mediation within sociocultural frameworks must carefully balance cognitive challenge with affective comfort to foster a safe communicative environment.

4.1.3 Modeling and Visual Scaffolding Strategies

The final category of the questionnaire explored students' perceptions regarding the use of modeling and visual tools as scaffolding techniques. These strategies aim to provide learners with clear examples and visual cues to facilitate their speaking performance.

Table 4. 4: Modeling and Visual Scaffolding Strategies

Item ID	Mean	Standard Deviation
Item 7	2.28	0.90
Item 8	2.38	1.12
Item 9	2.40	1.19

The results, as shown in the chart above, indicate that using visual aids such as pictures or videos (Item 7) recorded the highest level of agreement within this group (M = 2.28, SD = 0.90). This is followed by the provision of models or examples before students begin a speaking task (Item 8, M = 2.38, SD = 1.12). Lastly, the use of gestures and body language to clarify meaning (Item 9) received the highest mean score in this category (M = 2.40, SD = 1.19), suggesting it is perceived as the least frequently used strategy among the three.

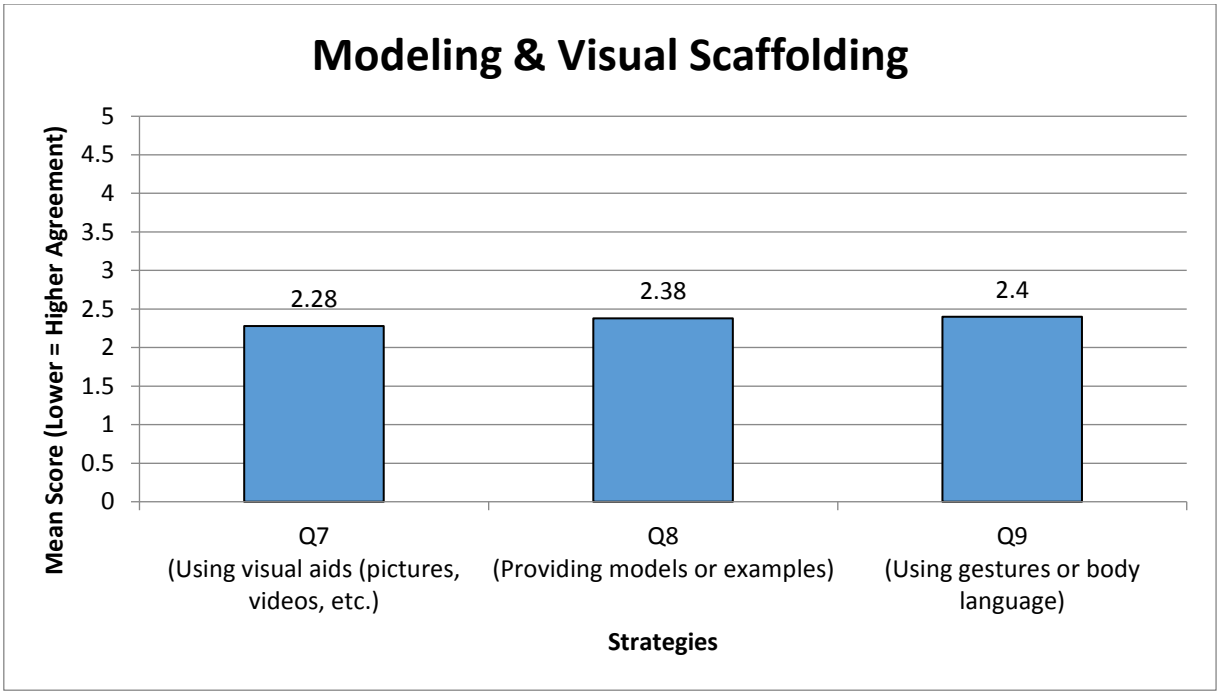


Figure 4. 3: Modeling and Visual Scaffolding Strategies

The relatively lower agreement on the use of gestures and body language (Item 9) can be interpreted in light of the traditional teaching styles often prevalent in the Libyan higher education context. Many EFL teachers at Sabratha University tend to rely heavily on verbal explanations and linguistic input as the primary modes of instruction. Consequently, the use of non-verbal scaffolding (such as intentional gestures or miming to clarify meaning) may be underutilized or perceived by students as a secondary tool rather than an essential scaffolding strategy. This suggests a need for more awareness among practitioners regarding the importance of multi-modal scaffolding in reducing the cognitive load on EFL learners during speaking activities.

The findings regarding modeling and visual tools reveal that students acknowledge strong teacher support through visual aids and model examples, while gestures and body language were identified as the least utilized technique. Wright (2008) observed that visual materials such as pictures and videos play a crucial role in providing immediate contextual support, which helps EFL learners bridge the gap between abstract linguistic concepts and active communication. Furthermore, Bandura (1977) emphasized that providing clear models or practical demonstrations before task execution reduces cognitive friction, allowing students to observe expected linguistic structures prior to production. However, the relatively lower reliance on non-

verbal scaffolding like gestures reflects a broader instructional pattern in higher education. As Sime (2006) highlighted, tertiary language instructors often prioritize verbal input over non-verbal communication, frequently underestimating how intentional body language can reinforce meaning. Expanding on this concept, Mayer (2009) explained that integrating multi-modal cues—combining auditory, visual, and non-verbal signals—significantly lowers cognitive load and enhances language comprehension, suggesting that university EFL teachers would benefit from adopting a more balanced, multi-sensory approach to scaffolding speaking activities.

4.2 Qualitative Results

This section explores the qualitative data gathered from the nine participating teachers at Sabratha University. By analyzing their open-ended responses, reseacher can gain a deeper understanding of how practitioners actually perceive and implement scaffolding in their daily speaking lessons.

4.2.1 Qualitative Data Themes

The following table presents the primary themes that emerged from the data, providing a roadmap for the subsequent analytical discussion:

Table 4. 5: Qualitative Data Themes

Main Theme	Key Concepts & Sub-themes	Teacher Consensus
Pedagogical Foundations	ZPD, temporary support, gradual fading, learner autonomy.	9 / 9
Affective Scaffolding	Lowering the affective filter, building confidence, anxiety reduction.	9 / 9
Linguistic & Cognitive Support	Vocabulary pre-teaching, sentence starters, breaking down complex tasks.	9 / 9
Modeling & Demonstration	Authentic samples, teacher-student role-play, oral demonstrations.	8 / 9

4.2.2 Deep Conceptual Awareness: (Theoretical into Practical)

The qualitative data reveals a sophisticated level of methodological awareness among the participants. All nine teachers demonstrated that they do not view scaffolding as a simple act of

"helping," but as a professional, structured intervention. Many teachers explicitly linked their practice to the transition from assisted to independent performance. For instance, Teacher 3 (T3) provided a particularly deep reflection, connecting the method to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), This teacher noted that scaffolding is about providing *"temporary and structured support"* that must be *"systematically reduced to encourage autonomy"*. Similarly, Teacher 4 (T4) emphasized the "fading" aspect, describing it as a *"gradual process that involves modelling, guiding, and prompting"* tailored to the students' specific proficiency levels. This suggests that the teaching staff at Sabratha University is well-versed in the cognitive requirements of language production.

The qualitative findings reveal that teachers possess a sophisticated theoretical understanding of scaffolding, viewing it not as casual assistance but as a systematic, professional intervention designed to foster student independence. Specifically, instructors such as Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 articulated how structured modeling, guiding, and gradual fading allow learners to move smoothly from assisted performance to autonomous communication. This professional awareness directly aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) foundational concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes that pedagogical mediation must be temporary and adaptive to lead to learner independence. Furthermore, Wood et al. (1976) originally described scaffolding as a process that enables a student to solve a problem or carry out a task that would be beyond their unassisted efforts, matching the teachers' focus on tailored, proficiency-level support. By consciously designing tasks that balance cognitive guidance with the gradual reduction of assistance, teachers support what Levelt (1989) identified as the complex cognitive demands of oral speech production, ensuring that students develop self-regulation in their target language performance (Goh, 2017).

4.2.3 Human Element: Addressing Speaking Anxiety

The most powerful theme across the nine interviews was the role of scaffolding in managing the "affective" side of language learning. Speaking a foreign language is often a high-stakes, high-anxiety activity for Libyan students. The teachers unanimously agreed that scaffolding serves as a psychological safety net. For example, teacher 8 (T8) gave a compelling account of this, explaining that scaffolding can *"transform the classroom from a high-pressure environment into a safe space"*. This teacher further elaborated that without such support, students often fall

back on *"silence or their native language"*. By providing the necessary "prompts" and "vocabulary," teachers feel they are bridging the gap between what students "passively understand" and what they can "actively produce." Teacher 9 (T9) supported this by stating that scaffolding is vital because it *"reduces fear"* and makes tasks feel *"manageable,"* which is essential for students at lower proficiency levels.

The unanimous agreement among teachers regarding scaffolding's role in mitigating language anxiety highlights the critical affective dimension of EFL instruction in foreign language settings. Teachers noted that providing targeted prompts and vocabulary helps transform high-pressure speaking tasks into manageable experiences, preventing students from retreating into silence or L1 use. Horwitz (2010) observed that foreign language anxiety acts as a primary obstacle to oral participation, often causing learners to experience cognitive freeze during speaking activities. In line with these findings, MacIntyre (2017) emphasized that reducing perceived communicative threat is essential for encouraging voluntary student participation. By offering immediate, supportive scaffolding, teachers create what Gibbons (2015) described as a safe learning environment that balances cognitive challenge with emotional security. Ultimately, this structured psychological safety net helps bridge the gap between passive comprehension and active output, echoing Swain's (2000) output hypothesis, which posits that learners require supportive communicative conditions to comfortably push their productive boundaries.

4.2.4 Practical Tools: Modeling and Interactional Support

When shifting from theoretical awareness to actual classroom practice at Sabratha University, the teachers' responses reveal a sophisticated procedural sequence designed to transform speaking tasks from daunting challenges into manageable communicative activities. This process typically begins with Modeling, which all nine participants identified as an indispensable step for clarifying both academic and linguistic expectations. Rather than plunging students directly into a task, teachers provide live demonstrations to set a clear benchmark for performance. Teacher 8 (T8) described a particularly interactive approach, acting out dialogues with high-level students to allow the rest of the class to observe the language in a natural context before attempting to replicate it. This support is not limited to human performance; it also includes the use of authentic materials such as audio recordings and short

videos. As noted by Teacher 3 (T3), analyzing these models with students helps them internalize discourse structures and correct pronunciation patterns before they begin their own independent production.

This procedural flow seamlessly integrates with Linguistic Scaffolding, which serves as the essential foundation for sentence building. The data suggests that teachers are acutely aware that speaking anxiety often stems from a lack of "linguistic raw material"; therefore, they precede tasks by pre-teaching key vocabulary and providing "sentence starters" or functional language frames. This type of support, as described by Teacher 1 and Teacher 6, does not merely offer momentary help but provides students with an organizational framework for their thoughts. This allows learners to focus on the fluency of their delivery rather than being preoccupied with searching for individual words.

Furthermore, this linguistic preparation is complemented by Interactional Support through pair and group work strategies. In this stage, the teacher's role shifts from being the sole source of information to a facilitator who creates space for Peer Scaffolding. Teacher 3 (T3) emphasized that this collaborative environment encourages more proficient students to support their weaker peers, creating a collective learning experience. Through this intentional synergy between clear modeling, ready-to-use linguistic tools and a safe interactive environment, teachers gradually guide students toward autonomy. This reflects the ultimate goal of scaffolding in an EFL context: empowering students to speak English with confidence and independence.

The qualitative findings in this section demonstrate how Sabratha University teachers operationalize scaffolding in practice through a structured, multi-stage sequence involving live modeling, linguistic frames, and peer interaction. By providing initial demonstrations, pre-teaching key vocabulary, and using sentence starters, instructors reduce the cognitive burden on students, directly reflecting Bandura's (1977) social learning theory regarding observational modeling and Levelt's (1989) model of language production, which highlights the need to lower cognitive load during speech formulation. Furthermore, analyzing multi-modal models such as audio and short videos aligns with Mayer's (2009) multi-modal learning framework, which suggests that combining auditory and visual inputs optimizes comprehension and discourse internalization. As the lesson transitions to collaborative pair and group work, the instructor shifts to a facilitator role, enabling peer scaffolding where more proficient students support their peers. This collaborative dynamic strongly supports Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal

Development (ZPD) and Swain's (2000) Output Hypothesis, demonstrating that interactive, low-anxiety peer environments empower learners to negotiate meaning and build oral production confidence before attempting independent speech (Gibbons, 2015; MacIntyre, 2017).

4.2.5 Conclusion of Qualitative Findings

The qualitative insights gathered from the teachers' interviews provide a clear and comprehensive picture of how scaffolding is perceived and practiced at Sabratha University. It is evident that teachers do not view scaffolding as a random teaching aid, but as a "vital" and "significant" professional tool that bridges the gap between a student's current ability and their potential for fluent communication. The findings show a strong consensus among the staff that providing structured, temporary support is the most effective way to help students move from "passive understanding" to "active production". By breaking down complex tasks and providing clear models, teachers believe they can effectively lower students fear and anxiety, creating a more secure and encouraging classroom environment.

Furthermore, the interviews highlight that the success of scaffolding depends on a variety of strategies, ranging from linguistic support like vocabulary pre-teaching to interactive methods like pair work. The teachers emphasized that their ultimate goal is not just to help students complete a single task, but to gradually build their confidence until they can speak "independently" and "fluently". This qualitative depth confirms that the instructional efforts at the university are intentionally designed to empower learners.

4.3 Discussion and Integration of Findings

The main objective of this study was to explore the support strategies used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking classes at Sabratha University from the perspectives of both students and teachers. By combining quantitative data from a student questionnaire with qualitative insights gleaned from teacher interviews, several important findings emerged. This section discusses these findings in light of the research questions and the existing literature.

4.3.1 Prominence of Procedural and Affective Scaffolding

One of the most striking findings of this research is the strong consensus between students and teachers regarding the intensive use of procedural and affective support. The quantitative results revealed that "clear directions" (Item 1, M=1.81) and "detailed explanations" (Item 2, M=2.08) were perceived as the most frequently implemented strategies. This statistical evidence is further reinforced by the qualitative data, where all nine participating teachers highlighted the necessity of structuring tasks clearly to manage the learners' psychological state.

The high level of agreement on these strategies suggests that scaffolding at Sabratha University is primarily used as a tool to lower the "affective filter." As noted in the literature, Libyan EFL learners often face significant speaking anxiety due to limited exposure to English outside the academic setting. Teachers in this study appear to be acutely aware of this challenge; for instance, one participant described scaffolding as a means to transform the classroom from a "high-pressure environment into a safe space". By providing crystal-clear instructions, teachers are not merely managing the classroom; they are reducing the cognitive load on students, allowing them to focus on language production rather than struggling to understand task requirements. This finding aligns with the theoretical arguments of Hammond (2014), who emphasized that clear task organization is essential for supporting learners as they navigate complex communicative activities. Furthermore, the emphasis on affective support resonates with the core principles of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. By operating within the students Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) through structured guidance, teachers are able to bridge the gap between "passive understanding" and "active production," ensuring that students feel secure enough to take risks in their oral performance. Ultimately, the dominance of procedural scaffolding in this context indicates a pedagogical priority: creating a predictable and supportive environment is the foundational step toward developing speaking fluency in an EFL university setting.

4.3.2 Role of Modeling in Speaking Instruction

The second major theme identified a significant reliance on modeling as a primary scaffolding tool. The quantitative data showed a high level of student agreement regarding the effectiveness of visual aids (Item 7, M=2.28) and the provision of models before tasks (Item 8, M=2.38). This is strikingly consistent with the qualitative findings, where all nine teachers confirmed that they

“consistently provide models or examples” to clarify expectations and demonstrate appropriate language use.

This strong emphasis on modeling reflects a specific pedagogical choice at Sabratha University: prioritizing structured support over unguided discovery. From the perspective of Bruner’s cognitive theory, this approach is highly effective for reducing task complexity. By providing a “live demonstration" or an "authentic audio clip,” teachers control the elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capacity, allowing students to focus on manageable linguistic patterns. As one teacher noted, acting out a dialogue with a high-level student allows the rest of the class to "observe the language in a natural context" before attempting it themselves.

However, the discussion here moves beyond simple imitation. The integration of findings suggests that modeling serves as a “benchmark for performance”. While some scholars argue that excessive modeling might limit creativity, the teachers in this study view it as a necessary foundation for “Accuracy” before “Fluency”. By internalizing these models, students build the “linguistic raw material” needed to eventually move toward independent production. This reflects a balanced interpretation of Bruner’s “spiral curriculum,” where learners revisit complex structures through guided examples until they achieve full autonomy.

4.3.3 Gap in Interactional Support and Guiding Questions

A very interesting finding in this study is the clear difference between what educational theory recommends and what actually happens in the classroom regarding interaction. The quantitative data from the students showed that “guiding or leading questions” (Item 4) received the highest mean score (M = 2.43), which means students perceived it as the least used scaffolding strategy by their teachers. This indicates that while teachers provide clear directions and examples, they do not frequently use step-by-step questioning to help a student find the right answer independently.

When looking at the qualitative data from the teacher interviews, we can easily understand the reasons behind this situation. In the specific EFL context at Sabratha University, teachers face real practical challenges. Engaging in a long conversation to guide a single student through a series of questions requires a lot of time and works best in small classes. In large classes with limited lecture time, teachers find it much faster and more practical to give direct feedback or immediate assistance rather than spending a long time scaffolding one student's response.

Furthermore, there is a strong psychological reason for this gap. As noted previously in this study, Libyan undergraduate students often experience high levels of speaking anxiety and a fear of making mistakes in front of others. If a teacher asks a student multiple guiding questions while the rest of the class is watching, the student might feel embarrassed or put under too much pressure. Therefore, teachers might intentionally avoid persistent questioning to prevent causing further stress, choosing instead to protect the students' feelings and maintain a safe classroom environment.

This finding highlights a practical challenge in applying Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in real-life university classrooms. Ideally, effective scaffolding should involve continuous "dialogic interaction," where the teacher and student talk back and forth to build meaning together. However, as Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) pointed out in the literature review, meaningful interaction becomes very difficult to manage in crowded classrooms. As a result, while teachers at Sabratha University successfully provide basic support to start speaking tasks, the more advanced process of transferring responsibility to the student through deep dialogue is limited by the reality of their teaching environment.

4.4 Summary of the Chapter

The quantitative findings gained from the student questionnaire revealed that procedural scaffolding is the most widely recognized form of support. Students highly appreciated receiving clear directions and detailed explanations before starting any speaking activity. This statistical result aligns strongly with the qualitative data from the teacher interviews. All participating teachers emphasized the importance of lowering speaking anxiety and building a safe, predictable classroom environment. Furthermore, both students and teachers agreed on the great value of modeling and visual aids as essential tools to clarify task expectations before students begin to speak.

However, the integration of both data sets also uncovered a notable gap in the use of interactional scaffolding. While educational theories highlight the importance of continuous dialogic interaction, students reported that guiding or leading questions were the least frequently used strategy. The teacher interviews clearly explained this finding by pointing to practical classroom constraints. Teachers stated that large student numbers, limited lecture time, and the

fear of increasing students' anxiety in front of their peers make it very difficult to use step-by-step questioning effectively.

In conclusion, the findings show that EFL teachers at Sabratha University successfully apply basic scaffolding strategies, such as clear instructions and modeling, to manage tasks and provide emotional support. However, more advanced interactional scaffolding is difficult to maintain in this specific academic setting due to institutional and psychological challenges. The insights gained from this chapter provide clear answers to the research questions and lay the groundwork for the final conclusions. The next chapter will summarize the entire study, discuss its limitations and offer practical recommendations for teachers, curriculum designers and future researchers.

Chapter Five
Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter draws the study to a close. It offers a summary of the whole study, states the conclusions that follow from them, and proposes practical recommendations for teachers and curriculum designers. The chapter also addresses the study's limitations and points to directions for future research.

What the data collected from students and teachers ultimately show is that scaffolding plays a meaningful role in EFL speaking classrooms at Sabratha University but not without gaps. While procedural and modeling support are well established in practice, more interactional and dialogic forms of scaffolding remain limited, largely because of contextual pressures such as large class sizes and time constraints. Understanding why these gaps exist is just as important as acknowledging that they do, and this chapter reflects on both the achievements and the challenges that the study has uncovered.

5.1 Conclusion of the whole Study

The results of this study lead to several important conclusions regarding the role of scaffolding in the EFL context at Sabratha University. These conclusions go beyond simple data to explain the deeper meaning of how students learn to speak in this environment.

First, it can be concluded that scaffolding acts as a vital psychological bridge for Libyan EFL learners. Since speaking is a highly demanding skill that often causes stress, the structured support provided by teachers is essential for lowering students' anxiety levels. By creating a safe and predictable classroom environment through clear instructions and modeling, teachers successfully encourage students to move from “passive understanding” to “active production”. Without this support, many students would likely remain silent or rely too heavily on their native language.

Second, while teachers possess a strong theoretical understanding of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the practical application of scaffolding is heavily influenced by institutional challenges. The study concluded that there is a preference for procedural and

modeling scaffolding over interactional scaffolding. This is not due to a lack of teacher awareness, but rather the reality of large class sizes and limited time, which make deep, individualized dialogue very difficult to achieve. Consequently, scaffolding at Sabratha University is currently more effective as a "task management" tool than as a method for deep interactive growth.

Finally, the high level of agreement between students and teachers confirms that scaffolding is a recognized and valued part of the learning process at the university. However, for scaffolding to reach its full potential in developing true learner autonomy, there needs to be a shift from providing "ready-to-use" language patterns to fostering more independent, spontaneous communication. This change would allow students to slowly take more responsibility for their own speaking performance, moving them closer to the ultimate goal of fluent and independent oral communication.

5.2 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study offer important insights for teaching English as a Foreign Language in higher education. First, the heavy rely on procedural support, such as giving clear directions and modeling tasks shows that structured guidance is effective in reducing student anxiety and building classroom confidence. While this approach helps students participate in speaking activities, the lack of interactional scaffolding suggests that current teaching methods focus more on managing tasks than on developing deep communication skills. To improve language learning, classroom instruction needs to balance basic task guidance with interactive questioning that challenges students to express their own ideas.

Additionally, the study highlights key institutional implications regarding classroom conditions. The finding that teachers struggle to use interactive scaffolding due to large class sizes, short lecture times, and student self-consciousness shows that structural limitations directly affect teaching choices. This implies that theoretical scaffolding strategies cannot succeed without addressing real classroom realities. For scaffolding to truly help students become independent and fluent speakers, universities must address these environmental constraints, allowing instructors the time and space to foster more spontaneous, unscripted communication.

5.3 Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several practical recommendations are offered to improve the use of scaffolding in EFL speaking classes. These recommendations are divided into two categories: those for classroom teachers and those for curriculum designers and policy makers.

5.3.1 Recommendations for Teachers

While procedural support is important, teachers should try to include more interactional and metacognitive scaffolding. Instead of only giving direct instructions, teachers can use "guiding questions" more frequently to encourage students to think and produce language independently. With the challenge of large classes, teachers are encouraged to use peer scaffolding more effectively. By organizing students into small groups or pairs (like "think-pair-share"), more proficient students can support their weaker peers. This reduces the pressure on the teacher and allows for more interactional support even in crowded classrooms. Teachers should use digital tools and online platforms to provide visual and linguistic models before the actual class starts. For example, sharing a video or a vocabulary list on a class group can save time during the lecture, allowing more space for active speaking practice and feedback. Teachers should provide "responsive feedback" that focuses on guiding the student toward the correct answer rather than just correcting the error. This helps maintain the student's confidence while improving their linguistic accuracy.

5.3.2 Recommendations for Curriculum Designers and Policy Makers

The university administration should consider reducing the number of students in speaking-specific modules. Smaller classes are essential for creating the "safe space" needed for deep, dialogic scaffolding and effective teacher-student interaction. Besides, there is a need for professional development programs that focus specifically on scaffolding techniques. Training should help teachers move beyond "task management" and learn how to implement more advanced interactional strategies in their daily lessons. The English department curriculum should include tasks that are specifically designed for gradual scaffolding. Speaking activities should be sequenced from highly structured (controlled) to less structured (free production) to ensure a smooth transfer of responsibility to the students. University authorities should ensure

that classrooms are equipped with the necessary visual and multi-modal tools, such as projectors and internet access, to support teachers in implementing diverse scaffolding strategies effectively.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the use of scaffolding at Sabratha University, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may affect the generalizability of the findings. First, the sample size and geographical scope are limited. The study focused specifically on fourth-year EFL students and a small group of teachers at the University of Sabratha. Therefore, the results may not fully represent the experiences of students and teachers in other universities across Libya or at different academic levels. A larger and more diverse sample from multiple institutions would provide a broader understanding of scaffolding practices nationwide. Second, the time constraint of the academic semester may have influenced the depth of the investigation. Scaffolding is a dynamic process that changes over time as students develop their skills. A longitudinal study, which follows students over a longer period, might offer more detailed information about how the “fading” of support actually happens as learners move toward full independence.

Third, the study relied on self-reported data from questionnaires and interviews. Although these instruments were carefully designed and tested for reliability, the responses reflect the participants personal perceptions and opinions. It is possible that there are differences between what participants reported and their actual classroom behavior. Including direct classroom observations in future research could help to confirm these findings through practical evidence. Finally, the environmental factors in the Libyan higher education context, such as occasional power outages or limited access to high-speed internet, may have affected the teachers' ability to consistently use multi-modal or technology-based scaffolding strategies. Acknowledging these external challenges is essential for understanding the practical reality of teaching and learning at Sabratha University.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the results and limitations of this study, the following suggestions are made for future researchers who wish to explore the role of scaffolding in the Libyan EFL context:

- Future research could investigate the effectiveness of scaffolding strategies in other language areas, such as academic writing or reading comprehension. This would provide a more complete understanding of how structured support affects overall linguistic development at the university level.
- It is suggested that future studies follow a group of students over a longer period (one or two years). This would allow researchers to observe the long-term impact of scaffolding and specifically how the "fading" of support occurs as students move from beginner to advanced levels of speaking proficiency.
- Given the increasing importance of digital tools, future research could explore how mobile applications or online platforms can be used to provide scaffolding outside the classroom. This could help address the challenge of limited class time in Libyan universities.
- It would be valuable to conduct comparative research between different public and private universities in Libya. This would help determine if the challenges found at Sabratha University (such as large class sizes) are common across the country and how different institutions handle these issues.
- Future studies could combine questionnaires and interviews with direct observation of speaking lessons. This would provide more objective data on how teachers actually implement scaffolding in real-time interactions.

5.6 Summary of Chapter

The journey of this research began with a simple but important goal: to understand how scaffolding strategies can support EFL students at Sabratha University in developing their speaking skills. Through a detailed analysis of both student perceptions and teacher experiences, this study has shown that scaffolding is far more than just a teaching technique; it is a vital psychological and pedagogical bridge.

The findings confirmed that while teachers successfully provide a safe and structured environment through clear instructions and modeling, the transition to deep, independent

interaction remains a challenge due to practical classroom constraints. However, the positive attitudes shared by both students and teachers indicate a strong foundation for future improvement.

In conclusion, developing speaking fluency in a foreign language is a complex and often stressful process for Libyan learners. By providing the right support at the right time and gradually encouraging independence, teachers can empower their students to overcome their fears and find their own voices in English. It is hoped that the insights and recommendations provided in this study will contribute to the ongoing development of English language teaching in Libya, helping both teachers and students reach their full potential in a supportive and effective learning environment.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Questionnaire: The Impact of Scaffolding Strategies on EFL Students Speaking Skills at Sabratha University from Teachers and Students Perspectives

Dear Students,

You are kindly invited to participate in this research study, which aims to investigate students perceptions of scaffolding strategies in developing speaking skills. Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time, your responses will remain confidential and will be used for academic purposes only, do not write your name.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Response Scale

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement using the following scale: (**1**=Strongly Agree), (**2**=Agree), (**3**=Neutral), (**4**=Disagree), (**5**=Strongly Disagree)

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	My teacher provides clear directions to help me perform speaking activities					
2	My teacher explains speaking tasks in detail so I clearly understand what to do					
3	My teacher offers assistance when I face difficulties during speaking tasks					
4	My teacher uses guiding or leading questions to help me complete speaking activities successfully					
5	My teacher gives constructive feedback to help me improve my speaking skill					
6	My teacher repeats or reformulates speaking tasks or instructions when necessary to help me understand better					
7	My teacher provides speaking models or examples that motivate me to participate in speaking activities					
8	My teacher demonstrates how to perform speaking tasks before asking us to do them					
9	My teacher uses videos, readings, mind maps, or visual aids to support my speaking performance					
10	My teacher designs speaking activities that are appropriate for my level and help me express my ideas creatively					

Appendix B: Interview

The Impact of Scaffolding Strategies on EFL Students Speaking Skills at Sabratha University from Teachers and Students Perspectives

Dear Professors,

You are kindly invited to participate in this research study, which aims to investigate teachers' perceptions of scaffolding strategies in developing students speaking skills, participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time.

All responses will remain confidential and will be used for academic purposes only, please do not write your name.

Thank you for your cooperation.

1.what extent are you aware of the scaffolding method in teaching speaking skill ?

2.What is your attitude towards the practical aspects of Scaffolding in speaking skills?

3. How important do you think scaffolding is in developing students speaking skills?

4.What types of scaffolding strategies do you usually use in speaking lessons?

5. Do you provide models or examples before speaking tasks? If yes, how?