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Using Instructional Scaffolding Strategies to Support Oral Productive Language Skills among English Majors at Majmaah University

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Abstract:
This study aimed at investigating whether using some instructional scaffolding strategies would be effective in developing oral productive skills among female English majors in the college of education in Azulfi, Majmaah University. It also aimed to know the size of that effectiveness. The participants of the study were 62 and they were divided equally into two groups; the experimental one studied the course with the intervention of the instructional scaffolding strategies and the control group studied the same course without any intended focus on the instructional scaffolding. The study adopted the pre-post design; average scores of the participants were calculated using T-test. The ratio of effectiveness was calculated using the Modified Black's Gain Ratio. Results were very promising as they revealed significant improvement in the mean scores of the experimental group in the oral test as T-test value was (5.41). The evidence indicated that using instructional scaffolding strategies was effective as the ratio of effectiveness was (1.06). Results highlighted the real value of instructional scaffolding while teaching oral skills in English class. It is highly recommended to integrate instructional scaffolding strategies as an inspirable element of English courses and to further investigate the processes that the teachers focus on while scaffolding.

Keywords: Instructional Scaffolding, Language Learning, Oral Productive Skills, Teaching English

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Introduction:

All the time, there are hotly endless debates around the best instructional practices with adamant defense and justifications. Still, Constructivism is one of those important pedagogical philosophies that founded for many effective strategies and techniques in Education. Its fundamentals were derived from the main natural assumption of learning and knowledge acquisition; learners build their knowledge on their own when they are enabled to reformulate the knowledge they previously acquired while guided by the others (Fosnot, 2013). Instructional scaffolding is an important concept shaped by constructivism. It provides learners with the guidance they need to construct a clear understanding of their learning and enable them to regulate knowledge without that perpetual reliance on teachers or parents. At the same time, most education systems in the Middle East compete to use technology-supported learning approaches and sometimes the only scaffolding type that is offered to learners is a technical one. Teaching English as a foreign language is one of the contexts that require abundant scaffolding because the learners try to overcome many linguistic and cultural barriers during language acquisition in general and its oral production in particular. Here, the study hypothesized that instructional scaffolding would help English majors to improve their oral productive skills and demonstrate more independent proficiency in oral presentations of ideas and topics.

Instructional Scaffolding

Instructional scaffolding is based on essential points of Piaget and Vygotsky who are respectively the two major cognitive and social constructivist theorists. They posited that learning occurs when new mental structures are built upon previous knowledge and understandings and when bridging the gap between what the learners know and what they are able to learn. (Piaget, 1979). To theoretically originate to instructional scaffolding as a concept, it is found to be much correlated to Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) of Vygotsky that refers to the difference in learners' actual ability to learn and solve problems by their own and their ability when assisted by more experienced people. It was defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". As explained by Vygotsky, ZPD refers to "what the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1987, p.86).

In different educational contexts, scaffolding is much seen as the encouraging guidance effort given to learners to work within their ZPD. Being unmentioned by Vygotsky himself, the term of scaffolding can be traced right back to the inspiring paper published by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) which presented the concept of scaffolding given by parents to their pre-school kids in a tutorial process and they defined scaffolding as a process "that enables a child or novice to solve a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (p. 90). Examining the relation between the two concepts, Walqui (2006) explains that "scaffolding and ZPD are closely related that only within ZPD that scaffolding can occur" (p.162). It means that a deep understanding of the concept of ZPD is required before approaching scaffolding as an appreciated technique of supporting learners' development. From this viewpoint, it can be imagined that ZPD is like a circle that represents the area in which real learning occurs and it embraces the other elements required

for that leaning to be born. Scaffolding inseparably lies in the middle of the circle being oriented by the teacher with many other elements like peers and learning resources. At the same time, scaffolding relation to ZPD is a dynamic lifetime one that requires scaffolding to fade and withdraw in a certain phase to leave a space for other important functions to work like self-regulation.

As stated by Van de Pol, Volman and Beishuizen (2010), scaffolding –as an educational concept- "has received much attention in research and an abundance of research on scaffolding in different contexts resulted" in identifying and stressing its importance in education (p.271). Thus, in their overview of literature published between 1998 and 2009, Van de Pol, et al. (2010) found that scaffolding appeared to be most fully developed in the field of literacy and reading comprehension.

Instructional Scaffolding strategies help teachers identify the best practices of effective learning. This is due to the analysis and understanding of real challenges and difficult areas of knowledge and the scaffolding activities teachers design to handle these challenges. An initial procedure is to design learning activities in line with the scaffolders that would guide learners in their learning. These scaffolders are obligatory signs that help them recognize their way into knowledge acquisition. In their viewpoint, Applebee and Langer (1983) identified scaffolding as a powerful analytical tool because it helps novice learners to carry out new tasks when they learn strategies and patterns that will eventually enable them to carry out similar tasks without external support. Proceeding from this, instructional scaffolding should be found echoed in every classroom. It is an effective way teacher use to assist learners to develop their oral language skills and get suited to language acquisition. Derived from its relation to ZPD, scaffolding is very essential in language classes. In fact, research related to scaffolding supports the use of instructional scaffolding strategies in language classes depending on the impressive interactive nature of scaffolding process itself (Van de Pol et al., 2010).

Experimental evidence revealed that instructional scaffolding has remarkable efficacy in teaching and learning in many subject-matter areas (Azih & Nwosu, 2011; Alake & Ogunseemi,2013; Palincsar, 1986; Pandhu, 2018). Of particular promise is the small body of research on its usefulness in foreign language classes and supporting teaching language skills like reading (Chou, 2013; Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004; Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016; Salsbury, 2005), writing, (Ahn ,2012) and second language production (BavaHarji, Gheitanchian & Letchumanan, 2014). Therefore, further research must expand on the available experimental evidence base signifying the effectiveness of instructional scaffolding in teaching different ELF skills in general and oral one in particular.

Oral productive skills

Improving oral productive skills of learners is an issue that deserved much dispute and genuinely it depended on amalgamating both assumptions and expectations of teachers and learners. Although the oral production of language is a crucial part of language acquisition, many educational systems still focus of the written skills on the ground that most of the assessment

systems require the written format of language production. Teaching many conversational and speaking courses for years, I clearly identified that learners feel hesitant and shy to contribute to any oral discussion and they feel they don't have enough command of language or control of the subject matter. They are obsessed by the idea that the more they speak the more errors they have and that, of course, will affect their marks. On the other hand, as described by Walqui (2006, p.160), they may feel and act better if they perceived that their teachers- Scaffolders- "expect them soon to get more involved and full-fledged members of the active class". In that way, a gap is observed between the best practices and current ones of teaching and testing oral language production. This gap relates to the amount of language exposure students have and their prior academic knowledge. Students who haven't been exposed to enough and appropriate comprehensible input or haven't pushed to talk and improve their oral skills may need to receive different types of scaffolding to start producing correct short forms of language and move on to have full discussion and conversations. Of course, there are significantly big experimental shreds of evidence of many successful investigations of techniques and strategies to enhance students' oral fluency and accuracy. Speaking in front of the audience, participating in a group oral presentation, and mastering the pronunciation of progressively more challenging vocabulary are important skills that benefit foreign language learners. (Vardell, Hadaway & Young 2006). The study here attempted to examine how much it would be effective to synergize different instructional scaffolding and varied oral production tasks to improve students' oral productivity of participants.

The current study

In the last five years, the enrolment of the English language students in Azulfi College of education grew with an adequate rate of regular program completion and graduation (64%). Still, examining students' score records for the last two years in most of the oral tests revealed a gap between students' level of written performance and the oral one. Students who academically passed different courses that required written performance were failing in oral tests. (Table 1)

Table 1. *Comparison of the mean of students' scores in written tests and oral test*

2017	1st semester	44	40	33.8	23.1
	2nd semester	43	40	32.8	25.3
2018	1st semester	45	40	33.4	25.1
	2nd semester	39	40	34.1	23.9

To assure the problem, a diagnostic oral test was conducted among 44 female students in the English department. It consisted on three questions and required the students to a) apply for a new job, introduce themselves and give a brief presentation of their skills, b) tell about their favorite type of food and c) tell who is their best friend and why. The mean of students' scores was (11.2) with a low percentage of (37. 3%). Moreover, one of the genuine motivations for this study came from the feeling that I got about students' oral proficiency while teaching Speaking courses. Thus, the study here attempted to turn around this situation. It hypothesized that the students would

develop their oral skills of the English language if they received more strategic instructional scaffolding from their teachers. The study built its framework on the assumption that scaffolding is more than modeling and imitation; it is a process that enables students to potentially achieve more than an assisted completion of tasks. Thus, there was an urgent need to redesign the curriculum of the speaking course by integrating the instructional scaffolding strategies. An experiment was conducted to investigate the efficacy of this integration by offering different types of instructional scaffolding and to work as a remedial treatment to help students overcome the deficiency of poor oral production of the English language.

Methods:

Questions of the study

The study aimed at answering the three following questions:

1- Is using instructional scaffolding strategies effective in supporting English majors' oral productive skill?
2- Is there a statistically significant difference between students' scores of the experimental and the control group in terms of the total score of the oral test?
3- Is there a statistically significant difference between students' scores of the experimental and the control group in terms of the criteria of the oral test?

Participants

The study was conducted on 62 female English majors enrolled in English language program in 2018/2019 academic year, in Zulfi College of Education, Majmaah University. They represented two sections of the speaking course in level 1. They were assigned as an experimental group (no.31) who have studied the course based on the instructional scaffolding strategies while the control group (no.31) have studied the same course normally without any certain emphasis on scaffolding forms. Both sections met once on a weekly base for three hours over 12 weeks. Both groups used the same syllabus and textbook, which was *Skills for Success 1: Listening & Speaking by Scanlon J. (2011)*.

The instructional scaffolding model of the study:

The study got to benefit from the literature reviewed through framing the program, identifying appropriate needed scaffolding strategies, and determining when to embed scaffolding and when to pull it off. (Anghileri, 2006; Byrnes, 2007; Ebbers & Rowell, 2002; Hogan & Pressley, 1997; Larkin 2002; Lewis, 2019; Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Smith , 2004; Webster, 2017). Instructional scaffolding is meant to help students to learn new content and acquire new skills that are too difficult for them to acquire alone without guidance or help. According to Turnbull et al. (2004), instructional scaffolding requires developing instructional plans to lead the students from guided learning to self-regulated learning to execute these plans, where the teacher provides support to the students at every step of the learning process. This shows off the real loads the teacher has throughout the whole process. "A teacher is challenged to find the learners' strengths and build on them to teach the important skills that will lead them either to academic or functional success"(Webster, 2017, Definition, para.1). According to Gibbons, 2002; Van Lier, 2006; Walqui, 2006, scaffolding is schematically framed as three related pedagogical scales; they are a)

planning the scaffolding structure of activities and tasks, b) the procedures of scaffolding, and c) the moment-to-moment collaborative interaction. It was characterized by six features which are central to any educational setting; they indicate that scaffolding has continuity, contextual support, inter-subjectivity, contingency, handover/takeover, and flow. This study integrated scaffolding strategies in a systematic frame that presents instructional scaffolding through three main scales and six main features. Generally, teaching tasks for each lesson included an oral activity with a subject related to the main theme of the unit. The instructional materials of the speaking tasks were integrated into listening texts. Some given similar tasks were assigned to students to be carried out as homework. Some Matters of shared interest were identified through discussion with students. These topics were integrated into the course as additional activities or home assignments. They were extended and merged to the suggested list of matters of interest. This was done as "in every program for English Language Learners, students' culture and language need to be appreciated and validated through class practices" (Walqui, 2006, p.106).

According to Byrnes (2007), Vygotsky identified four phases of instructional scaffolding; they are modeling by the teacher, imitation by the leaner, removing the scaffolding and finally performing the task individually by the student with an expert level of mastery. Based on this, this study adopted the following model to incorporate instructional scaffolding throughout the lesson:

1- The teacher presented the cognitive content, explained the new task and the learning goals to the student and told them how to use the visual scaffolders, answer questions, reflect on prompts or interact to any other scaffoldings.
2- The teacher started demonstrating the task to the students while integrating modeling to thinking aloud. Here, the teacher tried to explain what exactly the students have to do and provided a model of Think-Aloud Protocol (TAP).
3- The students, under the guidance of the teacher, completed the task following the model the teacher presented before. They were encouraged throughout the task to use TAP in order to show comprehension of the task and help the teacher to check their progress, offer guidance when needed and provide alternatives.
4- The class would be ready then for group or pair work to handle similar tasks with less guidance and help of the teacher. Here, the students were required to use the scaffoldings by their own and could create some by themselves; for example, they could state some questions or prompts for the oral task they have to complete.
5- As scaffolding should fade, individual students would work on some new similar tasks alone. They would receive corrective feedback from the teacher during their work or receive it later as the teacher sometimes preferred not to interrupt students' oral presentations.
6- The teacher shows appreciation and gives praising and supportive feedback to the students as they were in need to feel that they achieve progress and on the right track.
7- The program adopted some instructional scaffolding strategies. They included Reflection Prompts (words and hints), Cue cards, Verbal Scaffolding, Modeling, Summarizing, Questions, Modeling, Reading aloud, Sequenced Instructions, Organizational Segmentation, Visual Scaffolders (Graphic Organizers-Charts), Reading aloud (lyrics and short stories) and Thinking-Aloud Protocol.

Measuring tools and procedures

Oral production Test (pre & post-tests)

The researcher designed two equivalent forms of the oral test to control the learning effect and transfer. Every form consisted of three main questions that required oral verbal answers. It was taken into account to select themes that may lend themselves well to student's personal life as the aim was to test their oral performance features with little stress on content that may require prior knowledge. The tests were judged by a jury of English instructors who have taught the oral courses for many years to contribute their recommendations, check clarity and evaluate content reliability of the tests. A pilot study was conducted to calculate the suitable time of the test and it was found to be 10 minutes; it was conducted individually and students' answers were recorded for further procedures of scoring.

Scoring Rubric

Every test was footed by a brief rubric that illustrated the criteria and scoring system. This was done to help students know what they should focus on and how their oral production should be like. A detailed rubric was used by the examiner to give scores. It was used to analyze students' responses, count errors and judge the responses in light of performance indicators. The rubric was judged and evaluated in parallel to the tests.

Results

After teaching the course, the two groups were post-tested using the oral test form B. students' recorded answers were rated by two raters. As the experimental design of the study depended on comparing students' scores in pre and post testing, it was concluded that the resulting differences regarding the oral productive skills were due to the experimental treatment and accordingly to use the instructional scaffolding strategies. T- test formula was used to analyze the difference between the mean of scores of the participants in the Pre and the Post-measurements. First, pre-testing results revealed that students' mean of scores for both the experimental and control groups had no statistically significant differences in the total score of the test (Table 2).

Table 2. *Students' mean of scores in pre-testing of oral productive skills*

	Group	N	Mean	SD	Sig (2-tailed)	Significance level	T-value
Total score of the oral test	Experimental	31	23.68	7.467	0.096	0.05	1.69
	Control	31	27.35	9.538	0.096		

Table 3 reveals that there were no statistically significant differences among students' mean of scores in assessment criteria of pre-testing of for both groups.

Table 3. *Students' mean of scores in assessment criteria of pre-testing for both groups*

Criteria	Group	Mean	SD	Sig (2-tailed)	Significance	T-Value
Grammar (15)	experimental	4.61	1.76	0.170		1.387
	control	5.29	2.07	0.171		
Vocabulary (15)	experimental	5.06	2.39	0.171		1.386
	control	5.97	2.73	0.171	0.05	
Comprehensibility (15)	experimental	3.61	1.63	0.012		2.58.2
	control	4.26	1.59	0.120		
Pronunciation (15)	experimental	6.13	2.74	0.120		1.014
	control	6.84	2.76	0.315		
Ideas (15)	experimental	4.26	1.32	0.129		1.540
	control	5	2.34	0.130		

Second, post-testing results reveal that there are statistically significant differences among students' mean of scores for both the experimental and control groups favoring those of the experimental group. (Table 4)

Table 4. *Students' mean of scores in Post-testing of oral productive skill for both groups*

	Group	N	Mean	SD	Sig (2- tailed)	Significance	T-value
Oral test	Experimental	31	55.97	13.80	0.00	0.05	5.41
	Control	31	38.03	12.281	0.00		

Table 5 reveals that there are statistically significant differences among students' mean of scores in assessment criteria of post-testing of for both groups favoring those of the experimental group.

Table 5. *Students' mean of scores in assessment criteria of Post-testing of for both groups*

Criteria	Group	Mean	SD	Sig (2-tailed)	Significance	T-value
Grammar (15)	Experimental	11.42	2.49	0.00		4.53
	Control	8.10	3.24	0.00		
Vocabulary (15)	Experimental	11.03	2.75	0.00		4.09
	Control	8.06	2.95	0.00		
Comprehensibility (15)	Experimental	11.26	3.65	0.00	0.05	4.95
	Control	7	3.098	0.00		
Pronunciation (15)	Experimental	11.52	2.91	0.00		5.04
	Control	7.77	2.94	0.00		
Ideas (15)	Experimental	10.74	3.50	0.00		4.46
	Control	7.096	2.90	0.00		

According to the above-mentioned results, using instructional scaffolding was effective in improving English majors' oral productive skill. The ratio of effectiveness was calculated using the Modified Black's Gain Ratio (1.06). (Table 6)

Table 6. *Effectiveness Ratio using Modified Black's Gain Ratio*

Effective	1.06	75	23.68	**55.97**

Discussion

Results shew that instructional scaffolding strategies provided effective temporary support for the experimental group students and helped them reach high levels of understanding and mastery of the content that were unattainable in the same level to those of the control group. For the latter, some tasks were too challenging to complete even collaboratively. The students were encouraged to verbalize their thinking and articulate their thought aloud to be heard by the teacher and the class. It was difficult at the first two classes because of their fears of making mistakes or being out of ideas. When the students shared the same practice with mistakes being ignored, they started verbalizing their thoughts more confidently and resolutely. As an answer to the first question, Modified Black's Gain Ratio was calculated and identified as (1.06) which meant that using instructional scaffolding was effective in supporting oral productive skill among English majors. Students taught using instructional scaffolding performed far better than their counterparts who were not. As table 2 indicated, the mean scores of the students in the two groups were compared to assure that they are equal in terms of their academic level and their oral production performance is equivalent. As an answer to the second question, T-test was made to compare the differences between the average scores of the two groups.

The instructional visual scaffoldings used in the study helped to keep students' attention focused on the tasks and organizing their ideas effectively. Charts, tables, pictures, and graphic organizers were valuable in providing vocabulary and structures for the students during their oral presentation. Verbal scaffoldings like summarizing, questions, reading aloud and sequenced instructions helped students to minimize failure and relate their prior knowledge and form associations. They were helped to pronounce correctly, improve all phonological features of the target language like intonation and stress, and fill in the conceptual gaps to produce oral discussions and deliver speeches. The last two weeks of the study were really challenging as the students were required to complete the oral task independently and scaffolding was completely removed. What happened was exactly the same explained by Winnips (2001) when compared instructional scaffolding as a swimming tube. They had to use and apply every task without any guidance or help.

Here, the results of the study were much focused on many concepts related to instructional scaffolding like learners' ownership of their learning, sharing of responsibility and teachers' commitment to structure and appropriate learning tasks and environment. As supported by Applebee and Langer (1983), instructional scaffolding basically depends on changing the role of the teacher; s/he is the skilled language user who models the linguistic task verbally or written, who supports and encourages instead of evaluating learner's answers, and who reduces guidance gradually till the learner can generalize the acquired knowledge in similar circumstances.

Instructional scaffolding helped to accelerate and facilitating learning for students. At the same time, it requires a deep understanding of kinds and level of assistance and support provided by the teacher who is supposed to be very well-acquainted to his/her students' strengths and weaknesses as well. It also requires continuous planning for every task, designing step-by-step procedures of conducting tasks and proposing solutions for the challenges anticipated by the teacher. Students also have good attitudes towards any unconventional context that may offer them more guidance and practice whether it is technical or contextual one. (Abdelshaheed, 2017). Clearly, it can be concluded that success in using and benefiting instructional strategies depends on the amount of effort and skills that the teacher has rather than his pedagogical content knowledge.

Conclusions

Mounting empirical evidence confirms the gains EFL teachers can make when functioning instructional scaffolding strategies as inspirable elements of their teaching. Although most of the assessment systems require the written format of language production, instructors should work on enhancing students' oral productive skills, delivery skills, and organizational skills. Results of this study can be utilized to reconsider the real value of instructional scaffolding while teaching oral skills in English departments. They revealed the effect the instructional scaffolding had on students' skill and learning; therefore, it is highly recommended to further investigate the processes that the teachers focus on while scaffolding.

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Appendices

Diagnostic Speaking Test

Instructions of the test:

1- This test targets measuring your oral performance of English language for some scientific research purposes. It has no relation to your final course results or your academic record.
2- As the spoken language is transient, your responses will be recorded using a tape recorder to enable the examiner to check back your oral responses and assess them in leisure.
3- The total time of the test is ten minutes; you three minutes to answer each question.
4- You are allowed to write down any notes before giving the answer.

Question 1: You have a meeting to apply for a new job. Introduce yourself and give a brief presentation of your skills.

Question 2: What is your favorite type of food?

Question 3: Who is your best friend? Why?

	Grammar(4)	Vocabulary (4)	Comprehensibility (4)	Pronunciation (4)	Ideas (4)	Total (20)
Q 1						
Q 2						
Q 3						
Final Total (60)						

English Speaking Test (Form A- Pre Test)

Instructions of the test:

1- This test targets measuring your oral performance of English language for some scientific research purposes. It has no relation to your final course results or your academic record.

2- As the spoken language is transient, your responses will be recorded using a tape recorder to enable the examiner to check back your oral responses and assess them in leisure.
3- The total time of the test is 15 minutes; you five minutes to answer each question.
4- You are allowed to write down any notes before giving the answer.

Question 1: Tell a short story you have liked most when you were a kid.
Question 2: What is the country you want to visit? Why?
Question 3: Which is more important in life; money or academic certificate? Why?

	Grammar(4)	Vocabulary (4)	Comprehensibility (4)	Pronunciation (4)	Ideas (4)	Total (20)
Q 1						
Q 2						
Q 3						
Final Total (60)						

English Speaking Test (Form B- Post Test)

Instructions of the test:

1- This test targets measuring your oral performance of English language for some scientific research purposes. It has no relation to your final course results or your academic record.
2- As the spoken language is transient, your responses will be recorded using a tape recorder to enable the examiner to check back your oral responses and assess them in leisure.
3- The total time of the test is 15 minutes; you five minutes to answer each question.
4- You are allowed to write down any notes before giving the answer.

Question 1: Tell about your likes and dislikes on a vacation you spent abroad.
Question 2: What is the most difficult subject matter you have studied? Why?
Question 3: What are your views about allowing women to drive in KSA?

	Grammar(4)	Vocabulary (4)	Comprehensibility (4)	Pronunciation (4)	Ideas (4)	Total (20)
Q 1						
Q 2						
Q 3						
Final Total (60)						

English Speaking Test Rubric

Grammar	Answers are grammatically correct without errors	answers have some occasional few grammatical errors	there are some grammatical errors that interfere with communication	there are many grammatical errors that hinder comprehension	
Vocabulary	using appropriate vocabulary without errors	using vocabulary correctly with minor errors	using vocabulary with many errors	using vocabulary with many errors that hider comprehension	
Comprehensibility	answers are clear and completely fluent and comprehensible.	answers are quite comprehensible but with few pauses.	answers are incomprehensible at times with long pauses.	answers are incomprehensible with long pauses that hinder communication.	
Pronunciation	there are no errors and pronunciation mirrors excellent pronunciation	there are minor errors but don't hinder communication	there are many errors and mispronunciations	there are many major errors that hinder communication	
Ideas	expressing ideas properly and coherently	expressing ideas in an accepted way with little coherence.	ideas are quite limited and incoherent	ideas are limited, incoherent and not clear enough	