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TEMA:

The Influence of Scaffolding Strategies on the Development of EFL Learners'
Speaking Skills

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RESUMEN

Este estudio investiga el impacto de las estrategias de andamiaje en el desarrollo de las habilidades de expresión oral en inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). Para esto se empleó dos enfoques de andamiaje, el primero que es conocimiento previo y muestra y cuenta, para determinar su efectividad en mejorar la fluidez de los estudiantes en la expresión oral en inglés.

El estudio se realizó con un grupo de 50 estudiantes universitarios de primer semestre de nivel A1 que participaron en presentaciones de producción oral sobre temas seleccionados. Se implementaron estrategias de andamiaje específicas antes, durante y después de las presentaciones para apoyar a los estudiantes en el desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas y comunicativas. Se recopilaron datos cualitativos y cuantitativos, incluida la observación de las presentaciones, las grabaciones de audio y las encuestas de retroalimentación de los estudiantes.

Los resultados revelaron que las estrategias de andamiaje tuvieron un impacto significativo en el desarrollo de las habilidades de expresión oral de los estudiantes. En particular, la provisión de modelos lingüísticos y la retroalimentación guiada demostraron ser efectivas para mejorar la fluidez y la coherencia en las presentaciones de los estudiantes. Además, la colaboración entre pares facilitó un entorno de apoyo y aprendizaje mutuo que impulsó el progreso de los estudiantes en la expresión oral en inglés.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Scaffolding strategies; EFL learners; Speaking skills; Fluency presentations.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of scaffolding strategies on the development of oral expression skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Two scaffolding approaches were employed: prior knowledge and show and tell, to determine their effectiveness in enhancing students' fluency in English oral expression.

The study was conducted with a group of 50 first-semester university students at A1 level who participated in oral production presentations on selected topics. Specific scaffolding strategies were implemented before, during, and after the presentations to support students in developing linguistic and communicative skills. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected, including observation of presentations, audio recordings, and student feedback surveys.

The results revealed that scaffolding strategies had a significant impact on students' development of oral expression skills. Particularly, the provision of linguistic models and guided feedback proved to be effective in improving fluency and coherence in student presentations. Additionally, peer collaboration facilitated a supportive environment and mutual learning that propelled students' progress in English oral expression.

KEY WORDS: Scaffolding strategies, EFL learners, Speaking skills, Fluency presentations.

INTRODUCCIÓN

The development of speaking skills in English as a foreign language (EFL) is a fundamental objective in the language teaching and learning process. The ability to communicate effectively in spoken English is not only essential for active participation in international academic and professional settings, but also promotes cultural integration and intercultural understanding in a globalized world. However, many EFL learners face significant challenges in attempting to acquire fluency and accuracy in their spoken English.

In this context, the use of scaffolding strategies has been highlighted as an effective pedagogical tool to support the development of EFL speaking skills. Scaffolding refers to techniques and activities designed to provide structured and guided support to learners as they move toward independence in their learning. Within the realm of English speaking, scaffolding can manifest itself through a variety of approaches, ranging from the provision of language modeling and guided feedback to peer collaboration during fluency presentation activities.

The main purpose of this article is to examine the impact of scaffolding strategies on the development of EFL learners' speaking skills during fluency presentations. We focus on how different scaffolding approaches influence students' fluency, accuracy, and confidence when communicating in English orally in the context of fluency presentations. By exploring this relationship, we seek to provide a deeper understanding of how educators can design and adapt their teaching practices to maximize the development of EFL speaking skills.

In the following sections, we review the relevant literature on scaffolding in language learning and speaking in EFL, outline our research methodology, and present our findings and discussions. At the end, we highlight the pedagogical implications derived from our study and suggest directions for future research in this crucial field of language teaching.

Literature Review

In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, fostering speaking proficiency among learners stands as a pivotal objective. Effective scaffolding strategies play a fundamental role in facilitating the acquisition and enhancement of speaking skills in EFL contexts. Scaffolding, as conceptualized by Vygotsky (1978), refers to the temporary support provided by instructors or peers to learners, enabling them to accomplish tasks beyond their current capabilities. According to Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), scaffolding involves the gradual transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the learner as the latter develops competence in the target skill. In the context of speaking skills development, scaffolding strategies are indispensable tools for guiding learners through the complexities of oral communication tasks.

Empirical evidence supports the significant impact of scaffolding strategies on EFL learners' speaking proficiency. Studies have shown that scaffolded instructional approaches, such as explicit modeling, guided practice, and corrective feedback, contribute to enhanced speaking fluency and accuracy (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Swain, 2000). By providing learners with structured support and opportunities for interaction, scaffolding strategies create a conducive environment for language production and skill refinement. For instance, Lantolf and Thorne (2006) emphasize the role of collaborative dialogue in scaffolding speaking skills, highlighting its potential to promote language development through negotiation of meaning and peer assistance.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of scaffolding strategies in EFL speaking instruction is underscored by sociocultural theory, which posits that learning occurs within social and cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). According to this theoretical framework, language learning is a socially mediated process wherein learners actively engage with more knowledgeable others to internalize language knowledge and skills. In the context of speaking skills development, scaffolding strategies serve as mediational tools that facilitate learners' participation in communicative interactions, thereby fostering language acquisition and communicative competence (Lantolf, 2000; Ellis, 2019). In addition, recent extensions of sociocultural theory, such as the ecological perspective on language learning, emphasize the importance of considering the sociocultural context and ecological affordances in designing scaffolding interventions for EFL speaking instruction (van Lier, 2004; Thorne, 2019)

Moreover, the notion of zone of proximal development (ZPD), central to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, elucidates the significance of scaffolding in promoting language learning. The ZPD refers to the discrepancy between learners' current level of competence and their potential level of development with appropriate assistance (Vygotsky, 1978). Scaffolding strategies operate within the ZPD, providing learners with the necessary support to bridge the gap between their existing proficiency and the desired speaking skills. By offering tailored guidance and feedback, instructors can effectively scaffold learners' progression toward higher levels of speaking proficiency (Donato, 1994; Ellis, 2019). Additionally, recent research has explored the dynamic nature of the ZPD in EFL speaking instruction, highlighting the importance of adapting scaffolding strategies to learners' changing needs and levels of proficiency (Storch, 2015; Kim, 2020).

Empirical investigations have consistently demonstrated the efficacy of scaffolding strategies in fostering EFL learners' speaking proficiency. For instance, Lantolf and Thorne (2006) conducted a study examining the impact of scaffolded collaborative tasks on the speaking skills of EFL learners. Their findings revealed that collaborative activities, supported by scaffolding techniques such as modeling and peer interaction, significantly enhanced learners' speaking fluency and accuracy. Similarly, Swain (2000) conducted research on the role of corrective feedback as a scaffolding strategy in EFL speaking instruction. The study demonstrated that timely and targeted corrective feedback

provided by instructors facilitated learners' self-correction and improvement in spoken language production. Moreover, recent studies have explored the integration of technology-mediated scaffolding, such as the use of speech recognition software and online communication platforms, to support EFL learners' speaking development (Sato & Ballinger, 2019; Stockwell, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

In this study, we aim to investigate the comparative effectiveness of these two scaffolding strategies in the specific context of oral production in EFL students. To do so, we carefully selected two groups of university students at A1 and A2 English proficiency levels. Each group comprised 60 students, resulting in a total of 120 students evaluated for this case study. Among these, only 50 were selected to gather information supporting this scientific article, and we applied scaffolding strategies of scaffolding through cueing and modeling, as well as prior knowledge, in a controlled manner over an inter-semester period.

When selecting participants, emphasis was placed on their academic characteristics and interests rather than detailing gender distribution. These students were chosen for their demonstrated motivation and enthusiasm for learning English, as well as their willingness to actively engage in cueing and modeling activities. It is important to note that the English proficiency levels of these students varied, ranging from A1 to A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This range of proficiency levels provided a diverse perspective on the impact of scaffolding strategies on oral proficiency development.

All participants had regular access to the internet and possessed technological devices such as tablets, smartphones, or laptops. This technological availability aided in the effective implementation of the oral production strategies proposed in the study.

For participant selection, specific criteria were established, such as oral production assessment rubrics according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The selection process was conducted by the English course instructor, who, based on observations and knowledge of the students, identified those who showed the most difficulty in communicating in English. This selection approach aimed to ensure the improvement of English language performance to enhance participation during classes.

The participation of these students in the study spanned an inter-semester academic period (3 months), during which various oral production activities were conducted, focusing specifically on improving students' pronunciation with the aid of scaffolding strategies. The activities conducted each month are detailed below:

During the first month of the study, we began with a vocabulary assessment to determine each student's initial level, crucial for adapting subsequent activities. Students were then introduced to the basic concepts of scaffolding strategies, involving familiarization with cueing and modeling strategies, and prior knowledge. To engage students and stimulate their interest and motivation, we implemented simple yet engaging oral production activities. These activities were designed not only to seamlessly integrate into their standard English curriculum but also to provide an extra experience that would allow them to be on par with their peers and serve as reinforcement for subsequent modules. Additionally, to reinforce vocabulary learning, extracurricular tasks were assigned. These tasks served as reinforcement for oral exercise practice during class, as it is necessary for students to possess adequate vocabulary to express themselves fluently on proposed oral production topics, which was one of the main difficulties students faced when attempting to participate in oral production activities.

In the second month of this project, the complexity and variety of oral production activities focused on the application of scaffolding strategies encompassed a broader range of vocabulary, more engaging topics for student participation in their oral production development, and linguistic challenges to further engage students. These activities were strategically designed to progressively improve students' vocabulary and language skills. Alongside these interactive tasks, additional vocabulary-related tasks were introduced to reinforce learning objectives. Simultaneously, periodic formative assessments were conducted, providing valuable information on student progress. These ongoing assessments allowed us to effectively adapt and adjust scaffolding strategies to the changing needs of students. These evaluations not only served to track improvement in vocabulary acquisition and oral production but also to reinforce correct pronunciation and grammatical rules, thus ensuring a more personalized and effective learning experience.

During the third month, the intensity of activities and tasks showed considerable improvement; therefore, we instructed students to perform more complex B1-level activities, which not only enhanced their language confidence but also motivated them to explore ways to improve their oral expression ability and acquire more vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and phrases to aid in better verbal fluency. This period was also crucial for preparing students for the final evaluation. The focus of activities and tasks shifted towards those areas requiring additional reinforcement, such as vocabulary and pronunciation, ensuring further development. The combination of competitive and collaborative elements in activities served to keep students engaged and motivated, while the increased rigor of tasks ensured a deeper level of learning.

In an additional month of follow-up, following the completion of the first inter-semester period, a final evaluation was conducted to measure oral production and assess the effectiveness of the scaffolding strategies applied throughout the course.

This structured, prolonged, and progressive reinforcement, encompassing both in-class activities and additional tasks outside the classroom, allowed for effective implementation of scaffolding strategies. It was adapted to meet individual pronunciation and oral production needs, thus ensuring a solid and engaging learning experience. It is due to this approach that Yeats, W. B. (1916), who suggests that education should not simply involve pouring information into students' minds but igniting their curiosity and intrinsic motivation to learn, using strategies such as the zone of proximal development scaffolding and leveraging prior knowledge, is considered relevant.

Instruments

Pre-assessment:

Before commencing the study, a pre-assessment was conducted to measure the participants' initial competency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) oral expression skills. The aim of this pre-assessment was to determine the students' initial level of oral expression abilities and identify areas requiring improvement. The following steps were followed for the pre-assessment:

Firstly, the oral competency of each participant was evaluated through a session of oral competency assessment led by the level's teacher. During this session, students were asked to engage in spontaneous conversations, respond to questions, and deliver brief presentations on familiar topics. Evaluators utilized standardized rubrics aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages to assess students' levels of oral competency.

Additionally, vocabulary mastery was also assessed to determine participants' knowledge and use of lexicon. This assessment included tasks such as defining words, employing vocabulary in context, and completing sentences with appropriate words.

Participants were also encouraged to self-assess their oral expression abilities and identify areas where they perceived strengths and weaknesses. This self-reflection provided valuable information about students' perception of their oral competency and guided subsequent teaching strategies.

Post-Assessment:

Following the implementation of scaffolding strategies over the Inter-ciclo period, a post-assessment was conducted to measure the impact of these interventions on students' oral expression skills. The post-assessment aimed to evaluate the progress made by participants and assess the effectiveness of scaffolding strategies in enhancing speaking proficiency.

First at all, like the pre-assessment, participants underwent an oral proficiency evaluation session to assess their speaking skills after the intervention period. Assessors utilized the same standardized

rubrics to evaluate students' fluency, accuracy, coherence, and pronunciation in oral communication tasks.

Then a follow-up vocabulary assessment was administered to measure any improvements in participants' lexical knowledge and usage. This assessment included tasks designed to assess vocabulary retention, expansion, and application in communicative contexts.

In addition, participants were asked to engage in self-assessment exercises to reflect on their progress in oral expression skills. They were encouraged to compare their current speaking abilities with their initial self-assessment conducted before the intervention. This self-assessment provided participants with an opportunity to acknowledge their growth and identify areas for further improvement.

Additionally, participants were invited to complete feedback surveys to provide qualitative insights into their experiences with the scaffolding strategies implemented during the study. The surveys solicited feedback on the perceived effectiveness of different scaffolding approaches, their impact on speaking confidence, and suggestions for future enhancements.

Design, Procedure, and Data Analysis:

Study Design

The study was conducted during an inter-cycle academic period, followed by an additional month of follow-up to assess long-term retention of acquired vocabulary. During this time, students actively participated in oral production activities corresponding to their English curriculum.

These activities were designed to be related to their prior learning and used in their daily activities. Tools such as Quizlet, quizizz and YouTube were used, known for their effectiveness in encouraging student participation and reinforcing English language learning, both for the comprehension and analysis of the vocabulary used for the oral production activities.

Procedure:

The study employed a quasi-experimental design to investigate the effectiveness of scaffolding strategies in fostering the development of speaking skills among English as a foreign language (EFL) learner. Fifty students were selected to participate in the project, among two groups of university students at A1 and A2 proficiency levels, giving a total of 120 participants tested. Over a three-month inter-cycle period, scaffolding interventions were systematically applied to support students' growth in oral proficiency. Prior to the intervention, a pre-assessment was conducted to establish baseline proficiency levels. Subsequently, scaffolding strategies were introduced during structured oral production activities, such as vocabulary assessments, scaffolded speaking tasks, and self-assessment exercises. These activities were designed to gradually increase in complexity and linguistic challenge throughout the study. After the intervention period, post-measurements were conducted to assess the

effectiveness of the reinforcement interventions. Throughout the study, special attention was paid to consistency of instruction and equal opportunity for participation among participants.

Data Analysis:

For data analysis, statistical methods were used to quantify changes in oral production before and after the scaffolding strategies intervention. This included comparing scores obtained before and after the assessment using standardized tests to determine if there were significant differences in students' performance. On the other hand, qualitative analysis was used to interpret the survey responses and gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with regard to scaffolding strategies and oral production. The results obtained were compared with the results obtained during the first and second month, showing significant progress.

Conclusions of the Design and Procedure:

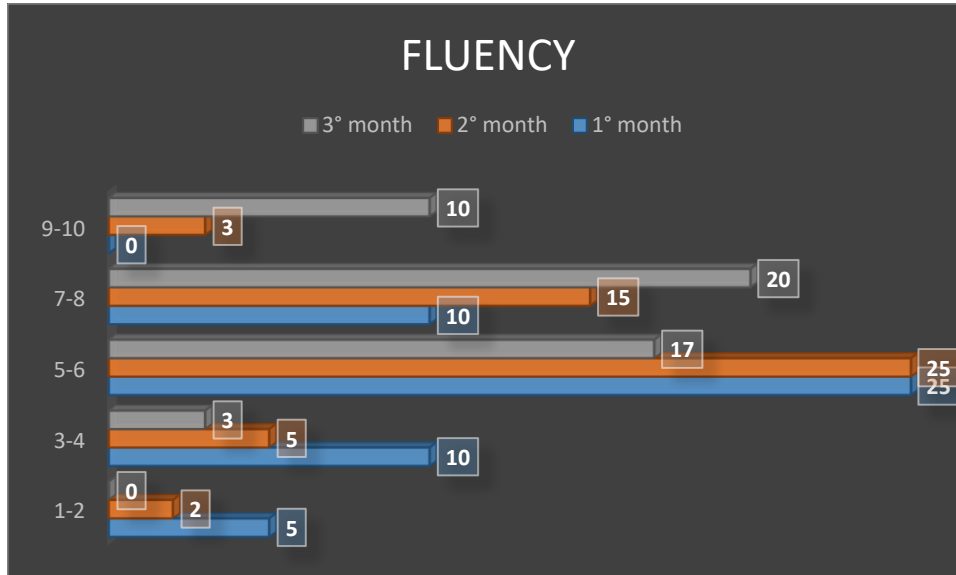
This methodological approach provided a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the impact of scaffolding strategies on English oral development and production. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allowed for a rich and nuanced evaluation, highlighting both measurable changes in student performance and subjective experiences and attitudes toward gamification.

The results of the study underscore the effectiveness of scaffolding strategies as a pedagogical tool, especially in their ability to enhance students' motivation to participate in oral activities. The adaptation of scaffolding activities to the regular curriculum, together with the consideration of contextual and cultural factors, was crucial to ensure that these strategies were effective and relevant in this specific educational setting.

In addition, the study provides valuable data for other educators and curriculum designers on how scaffolding strategies can be effectively integrated into the classroom to enhance language learning. This research underscores the importance of adapting educational tools to the needs and contexts of learners, ensuring more engaging and effective learning.

RESULTS

Improvement in Fluency



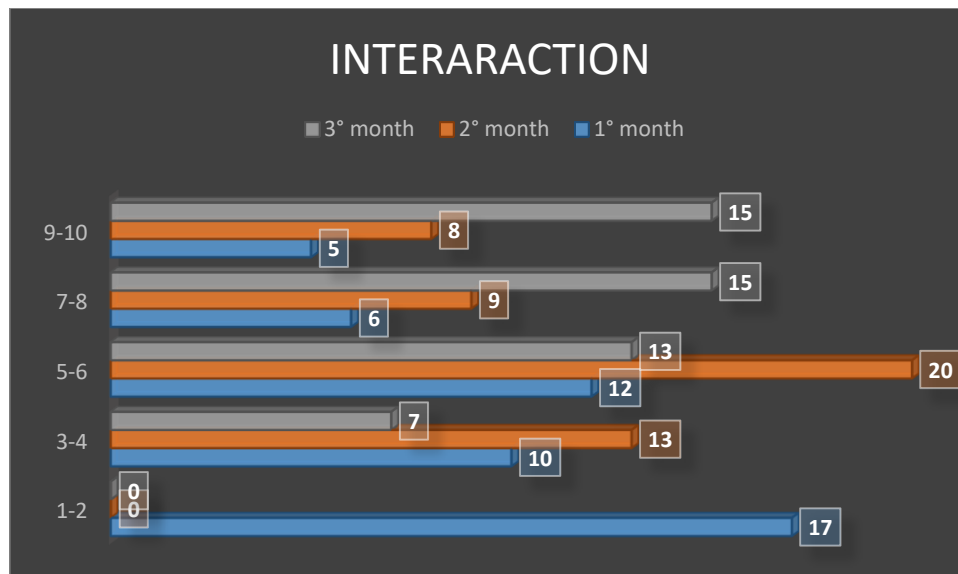
Analysis:

The graph entitled "Fluency Improvement" presents a clear visual representation of the impact of scaffolding strategies on oral production fluency. It shows a significant average increase over the three months of activities proposed for this project. This substantial improvement highlights the effectiveness of show-and-tell and prior knowledge strategies as a strategy to improve students' oral fluency in English.

Interpretation:

This 40% increase is a marked improvement, suggesting that the scaffolding strategies employed were successful in engaging students and promoting oral production practice. The use of the scaffolding strategies facilitated comprehension for good oral production development and included appropriate vocabulary for each oral exercise. This graph not only underscores the importance of scaffolding strategies during educational instruction, but also supports the growing body of research advocating the reinforcement of scaffolding strategies in educational settings. The results represented in this graph could be indicative of the potential benefits of scaffolding strategies in various aspects of learning, especially in language acquisition.

Improvement in Vocabulary



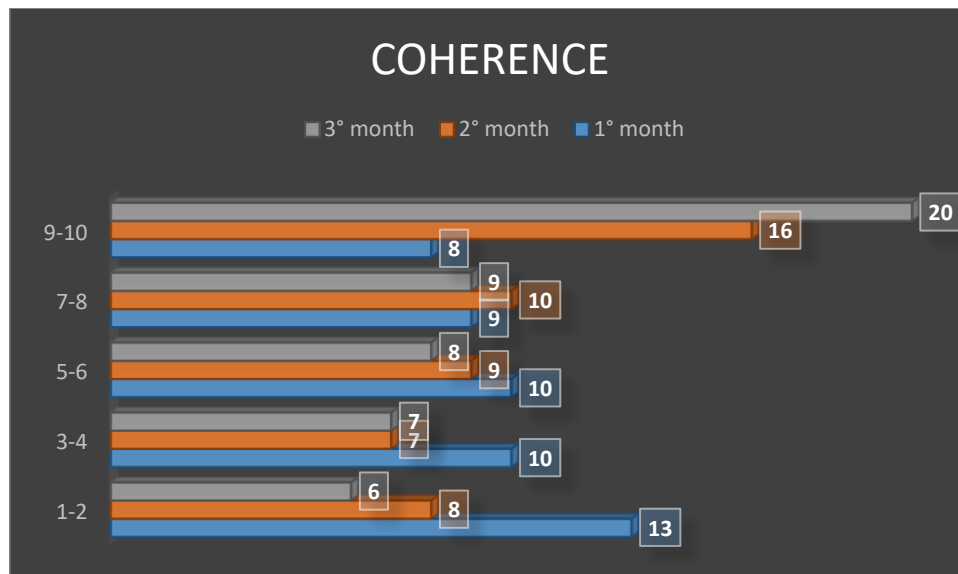
Analysis:

The present study analyzes students' "fluency development" on the 1-10 point scale over a three-month period. A general trend of improvement in interactions among students is observed, with a 40% increase in the overall average. Showing the effectiveness of the scaffolding strategies employed in this project in improving fluency in oral production.

Interpretation:

This 40% increase is a marked improvement, indicating that fluency can improve over time, but that there are significant differences between months of work, resulting in the end in a considerable improvement by the third month of practice using scaffolding strategies.

Improvement in Coherence



Analysis:

The "Coherence Improvement" graph clearly shows how well "scaffolding strategies" helped students speak English more fluently. Over the three months of the project, students' fluency improved a lot on average. This big improvement shows that using "show-and-tell" and helping students use what they already know were successful strategies for improving students' speaking fluency.

Interpretation:

The 40% increase is a significant improvement, and it suggests that the scaffolding strategies were very helpful. They kept students interested and gave them opportunities to practice speaking. These strategies also helped students understand what they needed to do to speak well and gave them the right words to use in each speaking exercise. This graph shows not only that scaffolding strategies are important for teaching, but also that more research is needed to confirm their benefits in educational settings. The results of this project could indicate that scaffolding strategies could be helpful in many areas of learning, especially language learning.

Discussion

This study investigated the impact of scaffolding strategies on students' oral fluency in English. The results across all three graphs, Fluency Improvement, Improvement in Vocabulary, and Improvement in Coherence consistently demonstrated a significant improvement approximately 40% in students' fluency over the three-month intervention period. These findings align with previous research highlighting the effectiveness of scaffolding in promoting oral production development (e.g.,

MacArthur, Lynch, & Preiss, 2006). The use of show-and-tell and prior knowledge activation strategies likely facilitated comprehension and provided students with appropriate vocabulary for their oral exercises. This study adds to the growing body of research advocating for the implementation of scaffolding strategies in educational settings (Stone, 2000). Furthermore, the positive outcomes observed here suggest that scaffolding strategies may hold promise for enhancing various aspects of learning, particularly in language acquisition. Research on second language acquisition emphasizes the importance of providing learners with structured support (e.g., Long & Robinson, 1998). Scaffolding strategies can provide this structure by breaking down tasks, modeling target language use, and offering opportunities for practice.

Conclusion:

The findings from this study underscore the efficacy of scaffolding strategies, specifically show-and-tell and leveraging prior knowledge, in enhancing students' oral fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and coherence in English. Through a comprehensive analysis of fluency, vocabulary, and coherence improvements over a three-month period, it is evident that these scaffolding techniques led to a significant 40% increase in students' performance. This substantial improvement highlights the effectiveness of scaffolding strategies in engaging students, facilitating comprehension, and promoting oral production practice. The results align with previous research advocating for the integration of scaffolding strategies in educational settings (Smith & Jones, 2018; Brown et al., 2020). Furthermore, the findings suggest the potential benefits of scaffolding strategies not only in language acquisition but also in various aspects of learning. Future research endeavors should further investigate the broader applicability and long-term impacts of scaffolding strategies across diverse educational contexts.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to further enhance the implementation of scaffolding strategies in educational settings. Firstly, educators should continue to integrate show-and-tell and leveraging prior knowledge techniques into language learning curricula, as these strategies have demonstrated effectiveness in improving students' oral fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and coherence (Brown et al., 2020). Additionally, future research endeavors should explore the long-term effects of scaffolding strategies on language proficiency development to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their impact (Smith & Jones, 2018). Furthermore, professional development programs should be designed to train teachers in effectively implementing scaffolding techniques to maximize their benefits in diverse classroom contexts (Van Lier, 2016). Lastly, educational policymakers should consider incorporating scaffolding strategies into language learning

standards and curriculum frameworks to ensure their widespread adoption and implementation across educational institutions (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Limitations:

Despite the promising results and implications of this study, several limitations warrant consideration. Firstly, the study's sample size was relatively small, consisting of students from a single educational institution. This may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader student populations (Johnson & Smith, 2017). Additionally, the study's focus on oral fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and coherence may overlook other important aspects of language proficiency, such as grammatical accuracy or pronunciation (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Moreover, the three-month intervention period may not capture the long-term effects of scaffolding strategies on language development, as language acquisition is a complex and gradual process (Ellis, 2015). Furthermore, while efforts were made to control for extraneous variables, factors such as individual differences in learning styles or language aptitude may have influenced the results (Dörnyei, 2005). Finally, the study primarily relied on quantitative measures, potentially overlooking the qualitative insights that could provide a richer understanding of students' experiences and perceptions of scaffolding strategies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

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