

## HIGH SCHOOL EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCAFFOLDING LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN LEARNING LISTENING SKILLS

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	03/7/2022	This paper reports a study on high school EFL students' perceptions of scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills. The study was conducted at a high school in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province, and it involved a cohort of 120 students in grade 10 who partook in answering the questionnaires. The gleaned data was processed by the software SPSS in terms of descriptive statistics. The results indicated that high school EFL students perceived the roles of the scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills as task-enabling support within the zone of proximal development and as language-mediated co-regulation. Additionally, EFL students believed the scaffolding learning activities were effective in enhancing their listening skills. This paper also presents the pedagogical implications drawn from the findings, which is hoped to be beneficial to EFL teachers and students in the research context and those in other similar ones, and to shed light on further similar studies.
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## NHẬN THỨC CỦA HỌC SINH PHỔ THÔNG VỀ HOẠT ĐỘNG HỌC BỔ TRỢ (SCAFFOLDING) TRONG VIỆC HỌC KỸ NĂNG NGHE TIẾNG ANH

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	03/7/2022	Bài báo trình bày nghiên cứu về nhận thức của học sinh phổ thông về hoạt động bổ trợ (Scaffolding) trong việc học kỹ năng nghe tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện tại một trường phổ thông trung học tại tỉnh Bà Rịa – Vũng Tàu, và đối tượng tham gia trả lời bảng câu hỏi gồm có 120 học sinh lớp 10. Dữ liệu thu thập được xử lý bằng phần mềm SPSS theo hình thức thống kê mô tả. Kết quả cho thấy học sinh phổ thông nhận hoạt động bổ trợ trong việc học kỹ năng nghe tiếng Anh đóng vai trò hỗ trợ tăng khả năng hoàn thành bài tập trong vùng phát triển gần và hoạt động tương tác có ngôn ngữ làm trung gian. Ngoài ra, học sinh phổ thông tin rằng hoạt động bổ trợ mang hiệu quả trong việc nâng cao kỹ năng nghe. Bài báo cũng trình bày các đề xuất sư phạm dựa trên kết quả nghiên cứu. Với các kết quả nghiên cứu này, bài báo hy vọng mang lại lợi ích đối với giáo viên và học sinh ở trong ngữ cảnh nghiên cứu này và ngữ cảnh tương tự, đồng thời hướng đến các nghiên cứu mới.
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## 1. Introduction

Scaffolding has emerged as one of the teaching approaches in general education and in English language teaching in specific as it provides essential and active support to learners throughout the learning process [1]-[5]. Scaffolding is based on the concept of providing additional assistance to learners as they learn new skills. Therefore, when learners can demonstrate better growth, the instructor gradually decreases his/her support and assistance. The term scaffolding is associated with Vygotsky's [6] Social Constructivism Theory, and it has been thoroughly described by several educational scholars; however, there is no agreement on how it should be defined [5]. Rasmussen [7], for example, recognizes scaffolding as a type of support for learners' development and learning. Likewise, Puntambekar and Hubscher [8] describe the growing usage of the scaffolding concept as a synonym for support. Sawyer [9] delineates "scaffolding is the support provided during the learning process that is tailored to the student's needs with the intent of assisting the student in achieving his or her learning goals" (p. 11). Within the scope of this study, scaffolding is understood as the teacher's support that is tailored to learners' needs in order to help them achieve their learning goals.

Scaffolding mechanisms include piquing learners' interest, alleviating the frustration, providing feedback, highlighting critical task/problem elements to consider, simulating expert processes, and questioning [5]. Hence, scaffolding in teaching-learning settings plays two significant roles: (1) scaffolding as providing task-enabling assistance within the zone of proximal development and (2) scaffolding as language-mediated co-regulation [10]. The former refers to the pedagogic activity that support learners' cognitive/affective engagements. The latter refers to as a specific type of mediating, task-based dialogue that is "built into tasks" and "provides students with the knowledge and strategies necessary to complete a new task, all embedded within a natural sequence of thought and language", thereby assisting the learner in internalizing the new knowledge and skills for eventual use in other contexts [11].

Scaffolding may be viewed as a component of "contextualized holistic approaches" that place a premium on real-world learning activities with the end aim of learners applying what they have learned in real-world situations [12]. Scaffolding is a procedure in which teachers give initial aids such as clues, prompts, and scripts that assist in regulating the order of pertinent learning acts. Teachers assess learners' performance throughout the class and then provide contingent aids to support proper learning based on learners' replies. Gradually, learners become used to the direction and develop the ability to self-regulate with less need for instructor assistance (internalization). Scaffolding is frequently recommended as a successful teaching approach in a variety of educational contexts, including online and blended learning [13].

Numerous prior studies have been conducted to determine the efficacy of scaffolding across various factors affecting learners, including their engagement, perception, interactions, behavior, performance, results, and satisfaction. As for the international contexts, Mercer et al. [14] proved the efficacy of the 'Thinking Together' approach, in which instructors encourage 'Exploratory discussion' to assist primary school children in communicating with and reasoning in small groups during science class. Throughout the program's twelve sessions, teachers scaffolded tasks by asking constructive questions and modeling problem-solving abilities. The results indicated that experimental students who received instruction on how to utilize this software were more adept at creating reasoning talks than those in the control condition who did not get such training (this was determined using transcripts of children's speech). Additionally, both the first and second groups of children achieved better levels of achievement in scientific learning than the latter groups, both on the group and individual levels. Reingold et al. [15] discovered that instructors' scaffolding enhanced students' reflective and metacognitive processes in an online course about democracy and diversity that was delivered as part of a teacher education program. In this course, 68 students were separated into two groups and assigned to work via an asynchronous online forum. They were experienced teachers working in Bedouin and Jewish

schools in Israel. They were tasked with holding conversations on touchy subjects such as democracy and inter-cultural strife in Israel's culture. By responding to each student's online postings, the teacher scaffolded the pupils. The findings indicated a significant positive association between instructor comments and students' metacognitive thoughts reflected in three metacognitive dimension-related posts (personal, task, and strategy). Regarding the context of Vietnam, studies on EFL scaffolding methods mainly focus on speaking skills, writing skills, reading skills. For instance, in their study, Le and Nguyen [16] used questionnaires to investigate the effectiveness of scaffolding in a multi-level class for ESL writing skills in a pre-university English course. There were 15 participants with English levels that varied from lower-intermediate to upper-intermediate level. The findings showed that when these assignments were manufactured by cooperation between the instructor and students or between students, they considered the writing exercises more pleasant or successful. This cooperation allowed all students to improve in the course, and they were left out of the conventional writing classroom, which provided ineffective supports. Nguyen [17] examined how students provided peer scaffolding to each other in the context of collaborative presentation and the way they profit from these experiences in EFL classes for Vietnamese. Through reflective reports and interviews, data was gathered from 12 individuals. The results showed that collaborative pairing generated circumstances for learning in which peers provide reciprocal assistance, supporting prior study findings. Hong and Nguyen [18] researched the teachers' beliefs and practices of scaffoldings students' reading comprehension through questioning at the pre-reading stage. This research is a descriptive study examining how teachers think and act to scaffold students' reading comprehension by questioning strategy. The research focuses on students' reading in lower secondary schools in a Mekong delta region in Vietnam. The questionnaires, observations in the classroom, and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data sixty-four foreign language teachers participated. The results provided insights into scaffolding methods used by giving instructional questions to help students understand the reading. It is observed that the a variety of studies have been conducted to investigate the use of scaffolding learning activities in various educational settings. It is noticed that there is a scarcity of research on the scaffolding learning activities in learning English listening skills. To that end, this study aims at exploring EFL students' perceptions of scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills at a context of a high school in Ba Ria Vung Tau province. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are high school EFL students' perceptions of the roles of the scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills?
2. What are high school EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills?

## **2. Research methodology**

### ***2.1. Research setting and participants***

This study was conducted at a high school in Ba Ria - Vung Tau province. Students at this research context had to learn English as a compulsory subject, using the English textbooks designed by Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam. The textbooks cover different aspects of language knowledge and skills designed within 10 units. Scaffolding learning activities were deployed during the listening lesson. The three listening stages (pre-, while-, and post-listening) feature different scaffolding learning activities (e.g., brainstorming, note-taking, discussion, dictation, role-play, reporting, summarizing, ect.).

A cohort of 120 high school EFL students from grade 10 were conveniently sampled. Among 120 participants, 61 (50.8%) participants spent less than one hour weekly self-practicing their listening skills; 35 (29.2%) participants allocated about two hours a week to self-practice their listening skills; and the rest allotted more than two hours a week to self-practice their listening skills. There was 40% of participants taking extra English courses, ranging from one to three years.

## 2.2. Research instrument

A closed-ended questionnaire adapted from Taghizadeh and Saadatju's [19] study was employed for data collection. It consists of two main sections: Section I seeking for respondents' background information; Section II featuring the main questionnaire content which includes two main parts: (A) EFL students' perceptions of the roles of the scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills (12 items); (B) EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills (9 items). All the items were structured with the five-point Likert scale (from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*). The questionnaire was designed in English, then translated into Vietnamese so that respondents did not have any trouble in answering it. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was measured for reliability. It was .85 for EFL students' perceptions of the roles of the scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills and .81 for EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills. This means that the questionnaire was reliable. The questionnaire was also piloted with ten students who shared similar characteristics with those in the main study.

## 2.3. Data collection and analysis

As for data collection, copies of the questionnaire were administered to students in person. Explanations and directions were given to students before they answered the questionnaires. Students had time to reflect and answer the questionnaire within two days. The returned copies of the questionnaire were 120 and valid for data analysis.

The gleaned data was quantitative, so the software SPSS was employed for descriptive statistics in terms of mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). The meaning of the interval mean score was interpreted as 1.00 - 1.80 (*Strongly disagree*), 1.81 - 2.60 (*Disagree*), 2.61 - 3.40 (*Neutral*), 3.41 - 4.20 (*Agree*), and 4.21 - 5.00 (*Strongly agree*). The inter-rating was carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the data analysis.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Results

#### 3.1.1. EFL students' perceptions of the roles of the scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills

The roles of the scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills include two aspects: (1) Scaffolding as task-enabling support within the zone of proximal development and (2) Scaffolding as language-mediated co-regulation.

##### *Scaffolding as task-enabling support within the zone of proximal development*

The results in Table 1 indicate that the average mean score of the role of Scaffolding as task-enabling support within the zone of proximal development is 3.61 (SD=.86) out of five, which means that EFL students agreed that their teacher provided scaffolding as task-enabling support to learn listening skills. Specially, EFL students agreed that their teacher provided "directions clearly to do the learning exercises" (item A1: M=3.94, SD=.94), "the listening tasks which [were] appropriate for [their] levels" (item A5: M=3.54, SD=.97), and "clues to help [them] find the correct answers for the listening tasks" (item A7: M=3.69, SD=.81). Furthermore, they reckoned that their teacher "[offered] assistance to [them] when [they encountered] complicated listening tasks" (item A2: M=3.43, SD=.98), "[made] listening topics more interesting to students using visual aids (pictures, videos, films, posters, etc.)" (item A3: M=4.03, SD=.99), "[repeated] the whole or part of a listening task for [them] if needed" (item A4: M=3.45, SD=.97), "[used] leading questions to guide [them] to do the listening tasks" (item A6: M=3.53, SD=.99), and "[focused] on important content after each listening lesson" (item A8: M=3.48, SD=.82).

**Table 1.** *Scaffolding as task-enabling support within the zone of proximal development*

No.	Content	N=120	
		M	SD
A1	My teacher provides directions clearly to do the learning exercises.	3.94	.94
A2	My teacher offers assistance to me when I encounter complicated listening tasks.	3.43	.98
A3	My teacher makes listening topics more interesting to students using visual aids (pictures, videos, films, posters, etc.).	4.03	.99
A4	My teacher repeats the whole or part of a listening task for me if needed.	3.45	.90
A5	My teacher provides the listening tasks which are appropriate for my levels.	3.54	.97
A6	My teacher uses leading questions to guide me to do the listening tasks.	3.53	.99
A7	My teacher provides clues to help me find the correct answers for the listening tasks.	3.69	.81
A8	My teacher focuses on important content after each listening lesson.	3.48	.82
<b>Average</b>		<b>3.63</b>	<b>.86</b>

*Scaffolding as language-mediated co-regulation*

As seen in Table 2, the average mean score of the roles of Scaffolding as language-mediated co-regulation is 3.79 (SD=.85) out of five. This can be interpreted that EFL students believed that their teacher provided scaffolding learning activities as language-mediated co-regulation to learn listening skills. They agreed that their teacher “[discussed] with [them] about previous or similar subjects before starting a new lesson” (item A9: M=3.85, SD=.75), “[asked them] to talk about the problems relating to the listening topics” (item A10: M=3.65, SD=.81), “[guided them] to solve the listening problems” (item A11: M=3.93, SD=.87), and “[discussed] with [them] to find out the correct answers” (item A12: M=3.73, SD=.97).

**Table 2.** *Scaffolding as language-mediated co-regulation*

No.	Content	N=120	
		M	SD
A9	My teacher discusses with students about previous or similar subjects before starting a new lesson.	3.85	.75
A10	My teacher asks students to talk about the problems relating to the listening topics.	3.63	.81
A11	My teacher guides students to solve the listening problems.	3.93	.87
A12	My teacher discusses with students to find out the correct answers.	3.73	.97
<b>Average</b>		<b>3.79</b>	<b>.85</b>

*3.1.2. EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the scaffolding learning activities in learning listening skills*

EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the scaffolding learning activities include two aspects: (1) student's knowledge acquisition and (2) student's learning success.

*Student's knowledge acquisition***Table 3.** *EFL students' perception of the effectiveness of scaffolding learning activities in improving their knowledge acquisition*

No.	Content	N=120	
		M	SD
B1	Scaffolding learning activities help me understand the listening process.	4.27	.92
B2	Scaffolding learning activities help me learn more about linguistic knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) for listening skills.	3.64	.73
B3	Scaffolding learning activities help me know more about the subject matter of the listening topics.	3.52	.70
<b>Average</b>		<b>3.81</b>	<b>.78</b>

Table 3 shows that the average mean score of EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the scaffolding learning activities in improving their knowledge acquisition is 3.81 (SD=.78) out of five. EFL students strongly agreed that “scaffolding learning activities [helped them] understand the

listening process” (item B1:  $M=4.27$ ,  $SD=.92$ ). Additionally, they agreed that scaffolding learning activities helped them “learn more about linguistic knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) for listening skills” (item B2:  $M=3.64$ ,  $SD=.73$ ) and “know more about the subject matter of the listening topics” (item B3:  $M=3.52$ ,  $SD=.70$ ). Such findings imply that EFL students recognized the effectiveness of the scaffolding learning activities in improving their knowledge acquisition.

#### *Student’s learning success.*

Regarding EFL students’ perception of the effectiveness of scaffolding learning activities in improving their learning success, the average mean score (Table 4) is 3.92 ( $SD=.75$ ) out of five, which can be understood that EFL students thought that the scaffolding learning activities were effective enough to improve their learning success. EFL students reckoned that scaffolding learning activities helped them interact with their peers (item B4:  $M=4.15$ ,  $SD=.83$ ) and teacher” (item B9:  $M=3.97$ ,  $SD=.77$ ). They also believed that scaffolding learning activities could “[improved their] listening skills” (item B7:  $M=4.05$ ,  $SD=.79$ ), “[reduced their] anxiety in listening” (item B6:  $M=3.71$ ,  $SD=.76$ ), “[got] more engaged in listening” (item B8:  $M=3.73$ ,  $SD=.70$ ), and “[became] good English [listeners]” (item B5:  $M=3.92$ ,  $SD=.73$ ).

**Table 3.** *EFL students’ perception of the effectiveness of scaffolding learning activities in improving their learning success*

No.	Content	N=120	
		M	SD
B4	Scaffolding learning activities help me interact with my peers.	4.15	.83
B5	Scaffolding learning activities help me become a good English listener.	3.92	.73
B6	Scaffolding learning activities help reduce my anxiety in listening.	3.71	.76
B7	Scaffolding learning activities can improve my listening skills.	4.05	.79
B8	Scaffolding learning activities motivate me to get more engaged in listening.	3.73	.70
B9	Scaffolding learning activities help me interact with my teacher.	3.97	.77
<b>Average</b>		<b>3.92</b>	<b>.75</b>

### 3.2. Discussion

Some remarkable findings from this study were found. The first major finding was that the study unraveled that high school EFL students perceived that scaffolding learning activities could play roles as task-enabling support within the zone of proximal development and language-mediated co-regulation. In terms of scaffolding as task-enabling support within the zone of proximal development, EFL students perceived that the teacher’s support using scaffolding learning activities during the listening lesson was meaningful for students to get engaged in the listening process. In this current study context, most of students found the English listening skills one of the most challenging skills to master, so they may encounter problems in learning listening skills. Nevertheless, the scaffolding learning activities were deployed to support and facilitate students’ listening process so that students may gradually achieve their learning goals. This finding was supported by Mariani [20] who has asserted that the scaffolding learning activities could enable students to achieve the learning goals, and when teachers could provide high support to students in terms of scaffolding learning activities, students accomplish the learning goals more successfully. Also, this finding is corroborated with that of Evi’s study [21] which has found that the scaffolding learning were proved to enhance students’ listening skills and engage them in the learning activities. With respect to the scaffolding as language mediated co-regulation, EFL students perceived that via the language mediation (e.g., discussing, communicating with teacher and peers) during scaffolding learning activities students could understand the learning activities and solve the learning problems. According to Wells [22], teacher - student conversation is the primary mediation technique used in teaching and learning process to facilitate individual and communal comprehension of curriculum objectives and teacher intentions. In addition, the teacher’s language-mediated behavior, whether intentional or

not, was realized as contingent, just-in-time task-relevant support [23]. Thus, through scaffolding learning activities, students could improve their listening performance when getting interaction with their teacher and peers. The finding was also supported by Le and Nguyen's research [16] who have pointed out that when the learning tasks were manufactured by cooperation between the instructor and students or between students, students' learning results could be more successful.

Another major finding was that students believed that scaffolding learning activities could improve EFL students' knowledge acquisition and their learning success. As regards the effectiveness of scaffolding learning activities in improving students' knowledge acquisition, students agreed that over the course of doing scaffolding learning activities they could gain more knowledge about how to do the listening tasks. Since scaffolding learning activities played positive roles in enhancing students' listening skills, students may get actively engaged in their listening activities to improve their knowledge about listening skills. This finding is backed up by previous studies [1], [2] which have revealed that scaffolding learning activities could have substantial influence on students' knowledge acquisition. Therefore, suitable scaffolding learning activities could be effective in activating students' cognitive processes. In respect of the effectiveness of scaffolding learning activities in improving students' learning success, students supposed that they could become more successful in developing their listening skills designed by scaffolding learning activities. Although students in this study did not spend much time on their self-practicing their listening skills after class, they could be motivated by the scaffolding learning activities to get engaged in doing listening tasks in class. Consequently, they may gradually take responsibility for their learning and be autonomous learners.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study has shown that high school EFL students recognized that scaffolding learning activities played positive roles in enhancing their listening skills and could improve their listening skills. Based on such findings, some pedagogical implications are recommended. Firstly, EFL teachers should be trained how to conduct the scaffolding learning activities to support and facilitate their students' language learning process in general and language skills in specific. They should be aware of the effectiveness and important roles of scaffolding learning activities in English language teaching so that teachers can adjust their teaching practices. Although scaffolding learning activities may be time-consuming, it is worth deploying them in English language teaching to support students to perform their learning tasks from dependently to independently. Secondly, EFL students should understand the purpose of scaffolding learning activities in English language learning and be clearly instructed on how to get engaged in the scaffolding learning activities so that they can take part in the learning process actively. Thirdly, it is advised that administrators should facilitate and support the implementation of scaffolding learning activities in English language teaching and learning so that teachers can be flexible in using a variety of teaching methods in leveraging the teaching and learning quality.

This study still has some limitations. The first limitation is the small sample size as this study involved 120 students from grade 10 from a single school. The second limitation is the research instrument (only questionnaire). Another limitation is the research focus (the scaffolding learning activities for listening skills). Therefore, further studies can be conducted with a larger scope of sample, instrument and research focus so that the findings will be generalized and suggest meaningful pedagogical implications for English language teaching and learning.

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