



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCAFFOLDING TECHNIQUES IN TASK-BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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Abstract: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is widely recognized as an effective approach for developing communicative language skills through meaningful interaction and real-life tasks. However, many students experience difficulties while completing tasks independently, especially in ESP classrooms. In such situations, scaffolding strategies can provide necessary support and help learners participate more actively in communication. This article explores the role of scaffolding in TBLT and its contribution to the development of students' linguistic competence in higher education. The study discusses how scaffolded support during different task stages improves learners' vocabulary use, speaking performance, collaboration, and confidence. The article also highlights the connection between sociocultural theory and task-based learning. The findings indicate that scaffolding creates a more supportive learning environment and increases the effectiveness of communicative language teaching in ESP contexts.

Keywords: Task-Based Language Teaching, scaffolding, linguistic competence, communicative competence, ESP, higher education, collaborative learning, language acquisition

Introduction

In recent years, English language teaching has increasingly shifted from traditional grammar-focused instruction to more communicative and learner-centered approaches. One of the approaches that has attracted considerable attention in this regard is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Unlike traditional methods that mainly focus on memorization and controlled language practice, TBLT encourages students to use language for meaningful communication through real-life tasks. Researchers such as Rod Ellis (2003) and David Nunan (2004) emphasize that learners acquire language more effectively when they actively participate in purposeful interaction rather than simply study grammatical rules in isolation.

Today, TBLT is widely applied in higher education because it helps students develop not only linguistic knowledge but also communicative and collaborative skills. This is especially important in ESP classrooms, where students are expected to use English in academic and professional contexts related to their specialties. However, in practice, many learners still experience difficulties during task performance. Limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and insufficient speaking experience often prevent students from participating actively in communicative activities. Such challenges are commonly observed among non-philological students whose exposure to English outside the classroom is relatively limited.

In such situations, scaffolding becomes an important pedagogical tool. The concept of scaffolding is closely connected with the sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky (1978), particularly the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development, which explains how learners can

perform more successfully with guided support. In language classrooms, scaffolding may include teacher guidance, vocabulary support, visual materials, modeling, peer collaboration, and structured instructions that help learners complete tasks more confidently. As students gradually gain independence, this support can be reduced step by step.

Many scholars argue that scaffolding and TBLT complement each other naturally because both approaches emphasize interaction, collaboration, and active learning. According to Willis and Willis (2007), properly supported tasks help learners stay engaged in communication without becoming overwhelmed by linguistic difficulties. Similarly, Ellis (2003) notes that guided task performance can improve both fluency and learner confidence. In ESP-oriented classes, scaffolding is particularly valuable because students often need additional support while working with professional vocabulary and specialized communicative situations.

Although TBLT has been widely discussed in international research, the role of scaffolding within task-based instruction still requires more attention, especially in the context of higher education in Uzbekistan. Therefore, this article aims to examine how scaffolding strategies can be integrated into TBLT and how such support contributes to the development of students' linguistic competence in ESP classrooms. The study also explores the pedagogical value of scaffolded tasks in creating a more supportive, interactive, and effective language learning environment.

Literature Review

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is considered one of the most effective approaches in communicative language teaching because it encourages learners to use language in meaningful and real-life situations. Unlike traditional methods that mainly focus on grammar exercises and memorization, TBLT emphasizes interaction, problem-solving, and active participation. According to Rod Ellis (2003), tasks create opportunities for natural language use where learners focus primarily on meaning while completing communicative goals. Similarly, David Nunan (2004) states that meaningful communication increases learner motivation and helps students connect classroom learning with real-world language use.

One of the widely accepted TBLT models was proposed by Willis and Willis (2007), who divided task-based instruction into three stages: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task. The pre-task stage prepares learners through vocabulary introduction, brainstorming, or modeling activities. During the task cycle, students communicate and collaborate to complete tasks, while the post-task stage focuses on reflection, feedback, and language improvement. This structure is especially useful in ESP classrooms because it combines communicative practice with gradual language development.

Despite its advantages, researchers note that many learners experience difficulties during task performance, particularly in classrooms with mixed proficiency levels. Students often struggle with limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and communication anxiety. Skehan (1998) argues that tasks may become cognitively demanding when learners are expected to focus on meaning, grammar, and interaction simultaneously. As a result, some students avoid participation or depend heavily on teacher assistance. These challenges show that successful task completion often requires additional pedagogical support.

In this regard, scaffolding plays an important role in supporting learners during communicative activities. The concept of scaffolding is closely connected with the sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky (1978), particularly the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development.

Scaffolding refers to temporary support that helps learners accomplish tasks they may not complete independently. Later, Jerome Bruner expanded this concept and emphasized guided interaction in the learning process. In language classrooms, scaffolding may include modeling, guiding questions, visual support, peer collaboration, vocabulary preparation, and teacher feedback. According to Hammond and Gibbons (2005), effective scaffolding supports learners without removing communicative challenge. In TBLT classrooms, scaffolding helps students participate more actively, reduces language anxiety, and improves confidence during interaction. Researchers such as Walqui (2006) and Gibbons (2015) also note that scaffolded instruction promotes both linguistic development and critical thinking through collaborative learning.

The connection between scaffolding and TBLT is particularly important in ESP contexts where students are expected to communicate using profession-related vocabulary and situations. In Uzbekistan, communicative and learner-centered approaches are receiving increasing attention in higher education. Local scholars such as Jalolov (2003) emphasize the importance of interactive methods that develop independent thinking and practical communication skills. However, many students still face difficulties in speaking and participating actively in English classes. Therefore, integrating scaffolding strategies into TBLT may help create a more supportive and effective learning environment for non-philological students.

Although many international studies discuss TBLT and scaffolding separately, research on their integrated application in ESP-oriented higher education classrooms remains limited. For this reason, the present study examines how scaffolding strategies within TBLT contribute to the development of students' linguistic competence and communicative participation in English language classrooms.

Methodology

The present study employed a mixed-method research design to investigate the effectiveness of scaffolding strategies within Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in developing students' linguistic competence. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allowed the researcher to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students' performance, classroom participation, and attitudes toward scaffolded task-based instruction. Mixed-method research was selected because it provides both measurable data and detailed insights into the learning process.

The study was conducted at International Nordic University among first-year students majoring in Economics. A total of 27 students participated in the research. The participants were divided into two groups according to their classroom organization and learning process. Both groups consisted of non-philological learners studying English as part of their ESP program. Most students demonstrated elementary to pre-intermediate language proficiency and experienced difficulties related to speaking fluency, vocabulary usage, and confidence during communicative activities. The research lasted for several weeks during the academic semester. During this period, English lessons were organized based on the principles of TBLT, including pre-task, task cycle, and post-task stages. However, special attention was given to the integration of scaffolding strategies throughout the learning process. Various forms of pedagogical support were implemented during classroom activities, including vocabulary



preparation, modeling, guiding questions, visual aids, peer collaboration, structured instructions, and teacher feedback.

At the pre-task stage, students were introduced to key vocabulary, topic-related expressions, and examples connected with the communicative tasks. Brainstorming and short discussion activities were also used to activate background knowledge and reduce learners' anxiety before task performance. During the task cycle, students worked individually, in pairs, and in groups to complete communicative tasks related to economics and everyday professional situations. While students were performing tasks, the teacher provided interactional support when necessary without interrupting the natural flow of communication. In the post-task stage, students participated in reflective discussions, error correction activities, and feedback sessions aimed at improving language accuracy and communicative confidence.

To collect quantitative data, pre-tests and post-tests were administered in order to evaluate changes in students' linguistic competence after the implementation of scaffolded task-based instruction. The tests focused mainly on speaking performance, vocabulary usage, communicative interaction, and task completion ability. In addition, qualitative data were gathered through classroom observations, student feedback, and informal interviews. These instruments helped identify students' attitudes toward scaffolded tasks, their level of participation, and the difficulties they experienced during classroom interaction.

The collected data were analyzed through comparative and descriptive methods. Quantitative results were compared to identify changes in students' communicative performance before and after the intervention, while qualitative findings were interpreted to better understand learners' experiences and classroom dynamics. The use of mixed methods made it possible to evaluate not only academic improvement but also changes in students' motivation, confidence, and willingness to participate in English communication activities.

Overall, the methodology of the study aimed to examine how scaffolding strategies within TBLT could support non-philological students in overcoming communicative difficulties and developing linguistic competence in ESP-oriented higher education classrooms.

Results

The findings of the study demonstrated that the integration of scaffolding strategies into Task-Based Language Teaching positively influenced students' linguistic competence and classroom participation. Throughout the intervention period, noticeable improvements were observed in learners' speaking performance, vocabulary usage, interactional confidence, and willingness to participate in communicative activities. Compared to the beginning of the study, students became more active during pair and group discussions and showed less hesitation while expressing their ideas in English.

One of the most visible changes was related to students' communicative confidence. At the initial stage of the research, many participants were reluctant to speak during task performance because of limited vocabulary knowledge and fear of making grammatical mistakes. However, after several weeks of scaffolded task-based instruction, students demonstrated greater engagement in classroom interaction. Pre-task support activities such as brainstorming, vocabulary preparation, and teacher modeling helped learners feel more prepared before communication tasks. Similarly, peer collaboration and teacher guidance during task performance reduced learners' anxiety and encouraged more active participation.



The quantitative results obtained from pre-tests and post-tests also indicated positive academic development. Students showed improvement in speaking fluency, task completion ability, and appropriate vocabulary usage. The comparison of average scores before and after the intervention is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Students' Pre-test and Post-test Results

Assessment Criteria	Pre-test Average	Post-test Average
Speaking Fluency	58%	78%
Vocabulary Usage	55%	81%
Communicative Participation	61%	84%
Task Completion Ability	59%	82%

As shown in the table, all assessment criteria demonstrated noticeable improvement after the implementation of scaffolded TBLT activities. The most significant progress was observed in vocabulary usage and communicative participation. This finding suggests that scaffolding strategies helped students become more confident in applying newly learned vocabulary during interaction and collaborative tasks.

Classroom observations also revealed that students became increasingly independent over time. During the first lessons, many learners relied heavily on teacher assistance while completing tasks. However, as scaffolded support was gradually reduced, students began solving communicative problems more autonomously and interacted more actively with peers. Group-based tasks particularly contributed to collaborative learning because students supported each other during discussions and shared ideas more confidently.

In addition, qualitative feedback collected from students showed generally positive attitudes toward scaffolded task-based instruction. Many participants stated that communicative tasks felt less stressful when vocabulary support, examples, and guiding instructions were provided before the activities. Several students also mentioned that pair and group work helped them feel more comfortable speaking English in front of others. These findings indicate that scaffolding not only improved linguistic competence but also created a more supportive classroom atmosphere. The results of the study demonstrate that the integration of scaffolding strategies within TBLT can positively affect learners' communicative performance, confidence, and classroom engagement in ESP-oriented higher education settings.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that scaffolding strategies can significantly increase the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching in ESP classrooms. The improvement observed in students' speaking performance, vocabulary usage, and communicative participation supports the idea that learners perform more successfully when they receive appropriate instructional support during task completion. In particular, pre-task preparation and guided interaction helped students participate more actively and reduced their fear of making mistakes while speaking English.

The findings of the research are consistent with the views of Rod Ellis (2003), who argues that successful task performance depends not only on task design but also on the

support learners receive during communication. Similarly, Willis and Willis (2007) emphasize that pre-task activities such as brainstorming, modeling, and vocabulary preparation help learners feel more confident before engaging in communicative interaction. In the present study, these forms of scaffolding appeared particularly useful for first-year economics students whose English proficiency was still developing.

The study also confirms the sociocultural perspective of Lev Vygotsky (1978), which highlights the importance of guided learning and social interaction in cognitive development. During collaborative tasks, students supported each other through discussion, clarification, and idea exchange. Such interaction functioned as a form of peer scaffolding and contributed to greater learner engagement. Over time, students became more independent and relied less on teacher assistance, which reflects one of the main goals of scaffolding in language education.

Another important finding was the positive effect of scaffolding on students' motivation and classroom atmosphere. Many learners who were initially passive became more willing to participate in discussions and group work. This suggests that scaffolded TBLT activities can help create a less stressful and more supportive learning environment, especially for non-philological students who often experience communication anxiety in English classes. The findings demonstrate that the integration of scaffolding strategies into TBLT not only improves linguistic competence but also supports learner confidence, interaction, and active participation in ESP-oriented higher education classrooms.

Conclusion

The present study explored the role of scaffolding strategies within Task-Based Language Teaching and their influence on the development of students' linguistic competence in ESP classrooms. The findings demonstrated that scaffolded support positively affected learners' speaking performance, vocabulary usage, communicative participation, and overall confidence during classroom interaction. The integration of vocabulary preparation, modeling, peer collaboration, guiding questions, and teacher feedback helped students participate more actively in communicative tasks and reduced their language anxiety.

The study also showed that scaffolding and TBLT complement each other effectively because both approaches emphasize interaction, learner engagement, and gradual development of communicative competence. Through scaffolded tasks, students became more independent and collaborative over time, which contributed to a more supportive and productive learning environment. In addition, the results confirmed that guided instruction is particularly important for non-philological students who may experience difficulties while using English in professional and academic contexts.

Overall, the research suggests that the integration of scaffolding strategies into TBLT can increase the effectiveness of ESP instruction in higher education. The study may be useful for English language teachers seeking practical ways to support learners during communicative activities and improve classroom participation. Future research may further investigate the long-term effects of scaffolded task-based instruction in different educational contexts and proficiency levels.

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