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# Scaffolding Practices in the Zone of Proximal Development: Evidence from Sulaymaniyah Private Schools, Subject of English

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## Abstract

This study investigates the scaffolding practices employed by English teachers in private schools in Sulaymaniyah within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). While scaffolding has been widely recognized as a key pedagogical strategy to bridge learners' current abilities and potential development, limited research has examined its implementation in the private sector in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Adopting a mixed methods research (MMR) design, the study combines quantitative and qualitative data collected through teacher questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The participants included 35 English teachers and 105 Grade 6 students from 28 private schools, with six teachers selected for piloting from two schools. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns. The results showed a high frequency of scaffolding strategies, such as breaking complex tasks into simpler subtasks, while individualized scaffolding based on each learner's needs was infrequent. The study concludes with a number of recommendations and suggestions for further studies.



## About the Journal

Zanco Journal of Humanity Sciences (ZJHS) is an international, multi-disciplinary, peer-reviewed, double-blind and open-access journal that enhances research in all fields of basic and applied sciences through the publication of high-quality articles that describe significant and novel works; and advance knowledge in a diversity of scientific fields. <https://zancojournal.su.edu.krd/index.php/JAHS/about>

## 1. Introduction

The core theories and assumptions underlying teacher-student interaction are drawn from Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which emphasizes that learning is a process shaped by social interactions, as described by Vygotsky (1978). It was in this context that a core pedagogical strategy, scaffolding, emerged—a method teachers use to provide temporary and modifiable support designed to bridge the gap between what learners are able to do on their own and what they can eventually accomplish within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Wood et al., 1976).

In Sulaymaniyah, the use of scaffolding in private English classrooms seems particularly important because students may not have many opportunities to hear English outside school. In this sense, teachers mediate the learning of language, breaking down difficult tasks and helping students with individualized support that guides them to independent learning. As a result, teachers need to adjust their teaching strategies based on the needs of each isolated learner, providing further assistance as students show progress.

### 1.1 Research Gap

While the importance of scaffolding in second foreign language learning is widely acknowledged, there has been little empirical research conducted to investigate whether and how English teachers implement it inside their classes in Sulaymaniyah. The question of how teachers adapt their strategies to align with students' Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD) and whether scaffolding methods truly address learners' cognitive needs has not been thoroughly examined. Additionally, the degree of correlation between scaffolding and other elements of teacher–student interactions such as feedback or affective engagement have remained underexplored in this context.

### 1.2 Research Questions

The study poses the following questions:

1. How do English teachers in Sulaymaniyah's private schools use scaffolding strategies, and what types and frequencies of methods are most commonly applied?
2. In what ways do scaffolding practices support learners' cognitive development within their Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD)?

### 1.3 Aims of the Study

The present study aims at:

1. Investigating the scaffolding strategies that are employed in English classes at private schools by revealing the types and frequency of scaffolding methods implemented by English teachers in Sulaymaniyah.
2. Examining the extent to which scaffolding methods address learners' cognitive needs within their Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD)

### 1.4 Value of the Study

This study holds significance on theoretical, pedagogical and contextual grounds. In theory, it applies Sociocultural Theory (SCT) to an empirical investigation of how scaffolding supports language learning. Pedagogically, it provides teachers with practical strategies to enhance their scaffolding strategies to better support learners' ZPD. Contextually, it is one of the first in-depth investigations into teacher-student interaction and implementation of scaffolding practices in private English classrooms in Sulaymaniyah. Hence, it addresses a notable gap in regional applied linguistics research by contributing to the local body of linguistic literature and curriculum development in the region.

## 2. Literature Review

### 1.2. Psycholinguistics and Its Theories

Psycholinguistics is a branch of study that takes in features of both psychology and linguistics, and centers therefore on language comprehension, language generation and language acquisition. It analyses the mental procedures and mechanisms involved in language, thus providing the groundwork for the second language acquisition (SLA). This can be well understood in relation to the English language where teacher-students interaction plays a central role in promoting a healthy

learning environment. Available literature points to the fact that instruction plays an enormous role in learning of a second language but this is complimented by the quality of interactions between educators and the learners (Gass and Selinker, 2008).

The very essence of the psycholinguistic study lies in emphasizing the relationship existing between language and thought on the one hand and thought and language on the other. Hypotheses in this area posited that language use and the cognitive systems responsible for it are modulated by social experience. For example, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which accords primacy to language as the instrument for cognitive development. As put forward by Vygotsky (1978), meaningful communication in learning environments helps students build their understanding and language competence, thus improving their learning experience

### **2.2 Behaviorism Reinforcement**

Behaviorism reinforcement refers to the process of increasing the likelihood of a behavior occurring in the future through use of consequences and rewards. According to Johnson (2011), *"Behaviorism, which views reinforcement as essential for learning, has been a major influence on current educational practices since its inception in the early twentieth century." (p.7). In this quote, Johnston defines reinforcement as a process that leads to the force of a response due to its consequences, implying that behaviours can be shaped through reinforcement.* For instance, In English classrooms, reinforcement may be in the form of praise, encouragement (Verbal Reinforcement) or rewards, which are supposed to encourage the students to repeat the desirable behaviours as in the case of correct pronunciation, active participation.

### **2.3 Connectivism Theory**

Connectivism is a learning theory that is closely related to the field of psycholinguistics. It was developed by George Siemens and Stephen Downes in 2005 on the idea that learning is an interconnected process that involves both individuals and their social networks. This means that knowledge is not only stored in our brains but also in different networks which can include people and technology at the same time which helps in learning too. According to Siemens (2005), *connectivism presents a new learning paradigm in comparison to behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism.*

Thus, it underscores the importance of networks and connections in learning processes and reflects the changes brought about by the internet and other technologies in the information age. (p.2) Accordingly, connectivism is unique compared to other theories of learning and emphasizes the role of networks and connections. An example is when learning takes place in an environment in which students participate with a community of practice and when knowledge is shared among people and digital tools in order to provide access to resources and cultivate interactive learning (Goldie, 2016).

### **2.4 Constructivism Theory**

Constructivism is based on the idea that people may make their own knowledge and that reality is determined by other experiences as learners. Basically, pupils use their previous knowledge as a background. According to Piaget (1952), *constructivism holds that the learner is the key player in the game of learning (p.9).* Piaget meant that learners actively construct their knowledge through some interactions with their environment and that learning is a dynamic process. In constructivism, students learn through construction of knowledge and socializing with each other. Plus, being a facilitator, group work is the perfect way for constructing and so is the binominal work. In the domain of education, constructivist pedagogies involve group discussions, collaborative tasks and experiential learning activities that enable students to co-construct meaning and apply their prior understanding to new situations (Fosnot & Perry, 2005).

### **2.5 Cognitivism Theory**

Cognitivism is a theoretical framework for understanding the mind that emphasizes mental processes such as perception, attention, memory, and problem-solving. It is the view that mental processes can be understood as information processing and that the mind can be studied using scientific methods, according to Sternberg (2008): *"Cognitivism is the view that mental processes*

*can be understood as information processing, and that the mind can be studied using scientific methods" (p. 4).*

Cognitivism believes that humans are creative, not just imitative. It is also a learning theory that focuses on how information is received, organized, or stored by the mind. Thus, in this theory, the mind is considered as an information processor like a computer that processes and retains information. Cognitivist methods in language learning include categorization, repetition and mnemonic devices that will assist in ordering and recollection of information (Anderson, 2010).

## **2.6 Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Language Learning**

Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky 1978) SCT is one of the foundational theories in educational psychology and second language learning. Unlike the earlier cognitive theories, which viewed learning as an internal mental process, SCT advocates the primary importance of social interaction and mediated learning in human cognitive and linguistic development. SCT posits that learning does not occur in isolation, it is the impact of interactions with others who help to shape those learnings (Vygotsky 1978).

The core principle behind this theoretical framework within which the research is embedded argues that socio-interactive processes are critical for cognitive and language development. Vygotsky (1978) asserts learning is fundamentally a social activity, where knowledge and information are co-created during interactions with community members or individuals with more knowledge or expertise, such as teachers. For this study, the proposed theory is applicable by demonstrating how students in English classes at private schools in Sulaymaniyah learn best when they engage in meaningful interactions with their teacher.

One of the most important contributions of SCT is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which explains how individuals make progress in their learning journey through social assistance before achieving individual competence. This process is achieved and brought about to being through scaffolding, a strategy in which teachers, peers or mentors provide structured support to help learners bridge the gap between their current abilities and their potential capabilities (Lantolf and Thorne 2006)

### **2.6.1 Sociocultural Theory in Classroom**

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory advocates for the whole-process speech communication in classroom as the leading way of language acquisition and learning. In the light of the present study that focuses on English Language Teaching (ELT) particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context like the private schools in Sulaymaniyah, the process of interaction is most significantly channeled through teacher-student communication. Teacher speaks and scaffolds language situations which give meaningful practice of the linguistic forms within the ZPD of learners. Such an interaction thus helps to promote not only the linguistic development but also the cognitive one needed for that interactions' handling.

Vygotsky (1978) also pointed at the idea of private speech when learners aloud to themselves as a regulatory technique in problem solving activities. Of particular reference in the process of language learning is for speaking and writing assignments where the student may speak or take notes of ideas in a bid to facilitate thought process and to help in producing language. This process can be fostered by teachers creating conditions that allow learners to practice language use individually, or in groups, where learners can discuss with each other and build on each other's learning.

### **2.6.2 Zone of Proximal Development**

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is considered a fundamental principle of psycholinguistic theory which was introduced by the psychologist Vygotsky (1978). This concept refers to the difference between what a learner is able to perform without guidance and what they are able to perform with assistance which is typically achieved through "scaffolding" provided by More Knowledgeable Other; MKO (Sazali et al.2022). Vygotsky claims that learning occurs when a more knowledgeable individual, such as a teacher or trainer, guides learners through the learning process, as he puts it:

*"The zone of proximal development is the distance between the actual development 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 (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)."*

Vygotsky states that learning takes place when a knowledgeable other, e.g. teacher or mentor, guides the learning process. Put simply, he describes the "zone of proximal development" as the gap between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guidance from an adult or collaboration with more skilled peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

For this reason, The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a key concept in education which describes a range of skills a student can acquire with the guidance and assistance of an educator, a more competent peer or with the help of an experienced instructor. Hence, it acts as a transitional stage during which learners can make notable progress. Furthermore, Vygotsky's assertion is that the variation of ZPD among individuals stems from individual differences in their skills and inherent competencies. Thus, it is within this zone that effective learning occurs (Cornell, 2023).

Additionally, the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is of paramount importance to understand language learning process. This area offers learners important feedback on how they use the language and helps them develop their vocabulary and their command of grammatical structures. Activities such as guided conversations, role-playing, household/team work, and guided collaborative projects can be used to move forward. And through guided dialogue, they can actually practice their language skills with correction from an expert. It is through this interactive method that they are able to hone their language skills and build confidence in the way they communicate with others since group projects allow students to collaborate, share knowledge, and solve challenges as a group. This cooperative method creates an engaging atmosphere that encourages students to actively engage and contribute to the educational process.

All in all, in the ZPD, the teacher's role is again a support provider in which he assists the learners to master language tasks they cannot do independently. This support, or scaffolding, can entail emphasizing and explaining the correct use of language in a given context, giving feedback in context- positive or negative feedback when required- or formulating questions (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). By such interaction, learners can find the ingested linguistic knowledge and can progressively become independent in their abilities to use a language.

### **2.7 More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)**

One of the central ideas in SCT is the role of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). This refers to someone—often a teacher, peer, or even a parent—who possesses a higher level of understanding or skill in a particular task. Vygotsky (1978) explained that learners advance most effectively when guided by an MKO who provides support within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In the classroom, this might be seen when a teacher models how to solve a grammar problem, or when a stronger student helps a weaker peer understand a text. The MKO's role is temporary and adaptive; as learners become more capable, the MKO reduces assistance, allowing them to gain independence (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

### **2.8 Self-directed Speech**

Another principle is self-directed speech, sometimes called private speech. Vygotsky (1986) highlighted that children, and even adult learners, often talk to themselves when trying to solve problems or regulate thinking. This inner dialogue is not meaningless; rather, it is a tool for organising thought and guiding action. In language learning, self-directed speech can be observed when students whisper words to themselves before answering or rehearse sentences quietly before speaking in class. Far from being a distraction, such private speech reflects the process of internalising external dialogue, eventually becoming inner speech that supports autonomous learning (Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2015).

### **2.9 Psychological Tools: Signs and Symbols**

Vygotsky (1978) also stressed the importance of psychological tools, such as signs and symbols, in shaping higher mental functions. These include language, numbers, diagrams, and even cultural artefacts that humans use to mediate thought. Language, in particular, is considered the most powerful tool because it structures thinking and communication. For EFL learners, signs and symbols appear in the form of vocabulary, grammar rules, and classroom visuals that help them

make sense of abstract concepts. By engaging with these tools, learners can move from external regulation (teacher guidance) to self-regulation, where they control their own learning processes (Wertsch, 1991).

## 2.8 Scaffolding

Scaffolding is a core principle in Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and plays a pivotal role in learning, cognitive development, and foreign language learning. It refers to the temporary support provided by a more knowledgeable individual (teacher, peer, or mentor) to help a learner accomplish tasks beyond their current independent capabilities (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). This assistance is gradually removed as the learner develops mastery and independence, making scaffolding a dynamic and adaptive process (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Scaffolding is closely related to Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes the difference between what a student can accomplish on their own and what they can accomplish with help. The idea of scaffolding makes it possible for students to progress through the ZPD with the help of more experienced people (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014).

Scaffolding can further be described as an approach where a teacher gives learners the guidance to assist the learners. These mentioned ideas have shown the serviceability of scaffolding when learners skills are developed. Vygotsky's assertion is that learners can always improve professionally with constant support since these scaffolding techniques enable the pupils to acquire new skills and knowledge with the assistance of others. This is further explained when he asserts that scaffolding is a necessary process whereby a teacher relinquishes the learning to the student. Learners are expected to be self-reliant thinkers. As such, in the view of educators, scaffolding is regarded as a prerequisite in promoting independence and critical thinking skills in learners. And when this happens, the teacher will have no role apart from initially exerting control over the student as he is eased into the process of self-guided learning.

In her book 'Apprenticeship in Thinking', Rogoff (1990) asserts that there is more to "scaffolding, as a concept, than just teaching. He is of the opinion that it has a wider application since it encompasses teaching higher order thinking skills and metacognition as well." (p. 56). As is obvious, when self-reflection is incorporated alongside the critical thinking objectives associated with Bloom's taxonomy, it is possible to achieve desired results. From this perspective, the role of the teacher shifts from merely one who delivers knowledge to someone who has to design, guide and facilitate the processes of learning through a variety of tasks and experiences. In the words of Gonulal (2018) "*scaffolding is not simply synonymous with teacher support; rather, it is specific, just-in-time support that gives students the pedagogical push that enables them to work at a higher level in activity.*" (p. 30)

All considered, it can be argued that scaffolding enables students to develop their cognitive abilities and mastery of language skills through structured support and guidance, which allows them to achieve more than they could do on their own. For this reason, scaffolding is regarded as an effective instructional method for creating meaningful and lasting learning, whether it is used in language learning environment or in classroom instruction.

### 2.8.1 Steps of Scaffolding

Scaffolding is a step-by-step process that evolves as learners gain independence. It starts with guidance and gradually shifts towards independence, making sure support is both meaningful and well-timed. The main steps are explained below.

#### 2.8.1.1 Temporary Support

Scaffolding begins with the teacher offering temporary support that helps learners accomplish a task they cannot yet do alone. This support can take many forms: modelling a sentence structure, guiding pronunciation, or breaking down complex texts into manageable steps. The idea, as Bruner (1983) explained, is that the teacher "lends" their expertise to the learner at first, making the task possible. In the English classroom, this might mean giving sentence starters during speaking tasks or walking students through how to brainstorm ideas for writing. Importantly, this help is not permanent—it exists only to bridge the gap between what students can do now and what they will later manage on their own (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976).

### 2.8.1.2 Gradual Removal of Support

The next step is the gradual removal of support, often called “fading.” As learners begin to demonstrate more confidence and independence, the teacher slowly withdraws assistance. This is crucial because over-scaffolding can make students dependent, while carefully timed withdrawal encourages autonomy (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). In practice, a teacher might first model an activity, then do it jointly with students, then let them try independently. By reducing support step by step, learners internalise strategies and move towards self-regulation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

### 2.8.1.3 Building on Existing Knowledge

Effective scaffolding also requires building on what learners already know. Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning should always connect to prior knowledge so that new information feels meaningful and achievable. In EFL, this could be linking grammar lessons to vocabulary the students have already learned, or using familiar cultural examples when explaining abstract ideas. By activating prior knowledge, teachers help learners anchor new input, making it easier to remember and apply (Gibbons, 2015).

### 2.8.1.4 Focus on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

It is worth noting that scaffolding always takes place within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the space between what learners can do independently and what they can do with guidance. If a task is too easy, scaffolding is unnecessary; if it is too hard, no amount of support will help. Instead, teachers must carefully calibrate their scaffolding so that it pushes learners just beyond their current level without overwhelming them (Vygotsky, 1978). In classroom practice, this means providing prompts, feedback, or hints that are challenging but achievable. When scaffolding is well aligned with the ZPD, students experience growth and eventually master the task independently (Shabani, Khatib & Ebadi, 2010).

## 2.8.2 Instances of Scaffolding

Scaffolding takes many practical forms in the classroom, including:

- **Modelling**- teachers demonstrate a task or linguistic structure for learners to imitate.
- **Providing prompts and cues**- guiding students to recall knowledge or generate responses without direct answers.
- **Breaking down complex tasks**- dividing activities into smaller, more manageable steps to facilitate learning.
- **Using visualizers**- incorporating charts or diagrams, supports comprehension and memory.
- **Feedback** – offering learners specific direction on what to correct or improve, reinforcing their progress.
- **Teamwork** - encouraging peer-to-peer scaffolding, where students learn collaboratively and support each other’s growth (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

### 2.8.3 Advantages of Scaffolding

Scaffolding benefits both teachers and students in powerful ways. For learners, it provides structured support that reduces anxiety and increases confidence when tackling difficult tasks. By working within their ZPD, students experience achievable challenges that motivate them to persist and develop autonomy (Vygotsky, 1978; Shabani, Khatib & Ebadi, 2010). For teachers, scaffolding offers a flexible framework for differentiating instruction, allowing them to meet students’ diverse needs without lowering expectations (Gibbons, 2015). It also fosters stronger teacher-student interaction, where guidance, encouragement, and feedback are exchanged dynamically. Ultimately, scaffolding creates a classroom environment where learners feel supported yet independent, while teachers act as facilitators of growth rather than mere knowledge transmitters (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

### 2.8.4 Procedural Definition of Scaffolding

In this research, scaffolding is procedurally defined as:

*“The set of instructional strategies employed by English teachers in private schools in Sulaymaniyah to assist learners with tasks they are not yet able to complete on their own. These*

*strategies include offering structured and tailored support within the learners' Zone of Proximal Development, eventually withdrawing that support as learning is internalized."*

This definition represents how the phenomena of scaffolding is seen, quantified and defined in relation to teacher-student interaction in this study.

### **2.9 Previous Related Studies**

Previous studies have explored scaffolding in second language classrooms. Gibbons (2015) studied scaffolding for supporting in mainstream classrooms and found that tasks and teacher mediation were significant. Hammond and Gibbons (2005) studied scaffolding within ESL education, and emphasized the role of scaffolding in balancing support and challenge. Scaffolding and Vygotsky's ZPD Shabani, Khatib, and Ebadi (2010) related the concept to Vygotsky's (1979) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and demonstrated its instructional implications. More recently, works like Lantolf and Poehner (2014) investigated dynamic assessment as a scaffolding strategy in SCT-based approaches.

It is worth noting that most of the existing studies have focused on Western or broader ESL contexts, leaving a gap in research regarding how scaffolding functions specifically in English classrooms in Sulaymaniyah and its impact on local school curricula. This case study contributes to the empirical literature by examining how teachers in Sulaymaniyah implement scaffolding strategies, integrate these practices with the principles of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and address both cognitive and emotional aspects of learning.

## **3. Methodology and Data Collection**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This research took a Mixed Methods Research (MMR) approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data to investigate the scaffolding techniques practiced by English language teachers in private schools in Sulaymaniyah. As Creswell and Plano-Clark (2017) emphasized, MMR helps to enrich the understanding of complex issues in education by linking numerical patterns with rich descriptive data.

The quantitative part aimed to explore how often scaffolding practices were used and what type was the most frequently employed one, while the qualitative part aimed at exploring how teachers utilized the strategies and how it was perceived by students within their ZPD. The use of more than one construct helped triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Burton & Bartlett, 2009).

### **3.2 Population and Sampling**

The population for this study consisted of 41 English teachers and 105 Grade 6 students from 28 private schools in Sulaymaniyah. Out of the 41 teachers, 6 participated in a pilot study, leaving 35 teachers for the main study. A purposive sampling method was employed to ensure that participants met the study's inclusion criteria—namely, being currently engaged in teaching English at private schools in Sulaymaniyah and having experience with communicative classroom activities.

### **3.3 Data Collection Tools**

#### **3.3.1 Questionnaire**

The teacher questionnaire measured the frequency of scaffolding strategies in classroom practice. Items were based on Sociocultural Theory principles and reviewed by a panel of jury members for content validity. The questionnaire was administered to all participating teachers, and responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale (Always, Often, Soemtimes, Rarely, Never).

#### **3.3.2 Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of teachers and students to gain deeper insights into the ways scaffolding was implemented and perceived. Teacher interviews focused on the specific strategies used to support learners within their ZPD, while student interviews explored how they experienced these scaffolding strategies in classroom interaction.

### 3.3.3 Classroom Observation

Classroom observations were carried out to document scaffolding practices as they occurred in real-time. An observation checklist, aligned with the questionnaire items, was used to record whether specific scaffolding behaviours were observed during lessons. Notes were also taken to capture contextual details and teacher–student interactions.

### 3.4 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with 6 teachers and 10 students to test the feasibility and clarity of the instruments. Feedback from the pilot study led to minor adjustments in questionnaire wording and interview prompts to improve clarity and ensure that items accurately captured the intended constructs

### 3.5 Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to how well a research instrument measures what it intends to measure, ensuring meaningful and reliable findings (Brown & Rodgers, 2002; Creswell, 2014). In quantitative research, validity ensures accurate representation of constructs, while in qualitative research, it ensures participants' perspectives are reflected (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Methodological triangulation enhances validity by analyzing data from various sources (Punch, 2005; Denzin, 1989). In this study, validity was ensured through expert validation, revisions based on feedback, and careful questionnaire design to enhance response accuracy (Fowler Jr., 2009).

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure under similar conditions (Dörnyei, 2007; McHugh, 2012). This study ensured reliability by employing consistent protocols for questionnaires, interviews, and observations, including the use of Likert-scale items and Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency (Mackey & Gass, 2015). Interviews followed a consistent format, and classroom observations were standardized to reduce bias and improve generalizability (Denzin, 1989).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Teacher Questionnaire

This section presents the data obtained from 40 respondent teachers through 20 items, using 5- point Likert scale questionnaire.

The following items aimed at finding the targeted teachers 'beliefs and knowledge concerning Scaffolding as shown in Table (1).

Variables	Sections	Responses					Statistical Indicators			
		Always	Often	Sometime	Rarely	Never	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-values	P-value
Scaffolding	I use cultural tools (e.g., familiar examples, visuals, and stories from students' backgrounds) to help guide students through complex tasks.	1	6	11	16	6	2.50	1.013	15.61	0.001*
	I use scaffolding techniques (e.g., breaking tasks into smaller steps, providing examples, modeling) to help students learn English effectively.	16	17	6	0	1	4.18	0.874	30.22	0.001*
	I gradually reduce my support as students become more confident in using English.	13	22	5	0	0	4.20	0.648	40.96	0.001*

Variables	Sections	Responses					Statistical Indicators			
		Always	Often	Sometime	Rarely	Never	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-values	P-value
Overall mean score for Scaffolding						3.62	0.614	37.33	0.001*	

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and one-sample t-test for all the phrases of the Scaffolding factor or variable, in which:

- 1.The overall weighted mean of "Scaffolding" is 3.62, and the standard deviation is 0.614 with a significant p-value of 0.001, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the responders from the teachers generally fall within the "often" level for all phrases related to "Scaffolding."
- 2.The weighted mean for item question "I use cultural tools (e.g., familiar examples, visuals, and stories from students' backgrounds) to help guide students through complex tasks," is 2.5, with a standard deviation of 1.013. The p-value is less than 0.05. To put it differently, teachers seldom believe that they utilize cultural tools such as relatable examples, visuals, and stories from students' backgrounds to help students navigate complex tasks.
- 3.The weighted mean for item question "I use scaffolding techniques (e.g., breaking tasks into smaller steps, providing examples, modeling) to help students learn English effectively" is 4.18 with a standard deviation of 0.874. Its p-value is less than 0.05. This entails that teachers' responses to this question were at an 'often' level. Alternatively, by contributing to group projects, English instructors fulfill the roles of co-workers and facilitators. A professional teacher of English as a second language should also be able to give constructive feedback.
- 4.The weighted mean for the item question "I gradually reduce my support as students become more confident in using English" is 4.20 with a standard deviation of 0.648. Its p-value is less than 0.05, indicating that teachers' responses to this question were at an 'always' level. In simpler terms, teachers always believe in gradually reducing support as students gain confidence in using the English language.

#### 4.2 Teacher Interview Questions and Analysis

This section focuses on presenting the data gathered from the interviews with 35 English teachers. The responses have been organized into themes, with the frequency of each response noted alongside the corresponding themes.

Table 2: Frequency Table for Adjusting Teaching Styles

9.How do you adjust your teaching style to support students who struggle with difficult tasks?		
Themes	Response	Percentage
Step-by-Step Scaffolding & Modeling	16	45.71
Differentiation & Instructional Adaptation	8	22.86
Emotional & Motivational Support	5	14.29
Support Outside Classroom (Parental/Peer/TA)	4	11.43
Interest-Based or Real-Life Learning	2	5.71

Figure 1: Frequency of Adjusting Teaching Styles

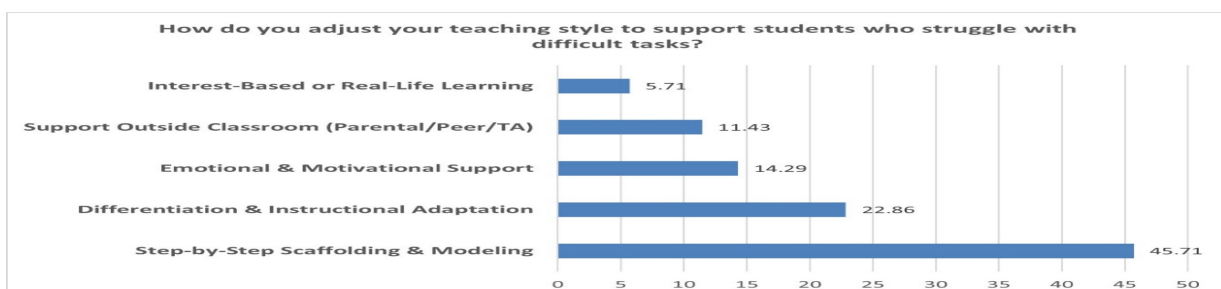


Table 2 and Figure 1 show that the primary strategy for helping students with difficult tasks is step-by-step scaffolding and modeling, meaning 45.71% of teachers break tasks into smaller parts. The next most common approach is differentiation and instructional adaptation 22.86%, followed by emotional and motivational support 14.29%, highlighting the role of empathy in learning. Finally, small portions of teachers- 11.43%) and (5.71 %- provide external help outside classroom and connect lessons to students' interests.

Table 3: Frequency Table for Encouraging Independent Thinking After Initial Guidance

<b>10. How do you encourage them to think independently after some initial guidance?</b>		
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Use of Open-Ended Questions and Gradual Withdrawal of Support	13	37.14
Encouraging Expression Through Discussion, Debate, and Sharing Ideas	9	25.72
Peer Work and Collaborative Support for Independence	6	17.14
Task Structuring Toward Autonomy	4	11.43
Motivation Through Rewards and Responsibilities	3	8.57

Figure 2: Frequency of Encouraging Independent Thinking After Initial Guidance

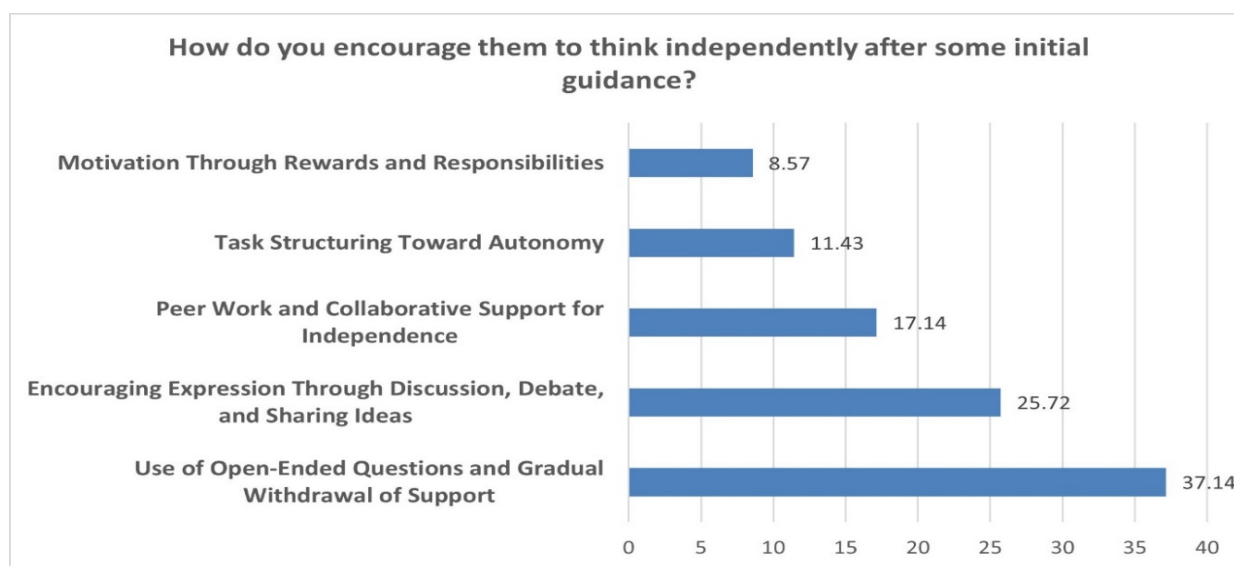


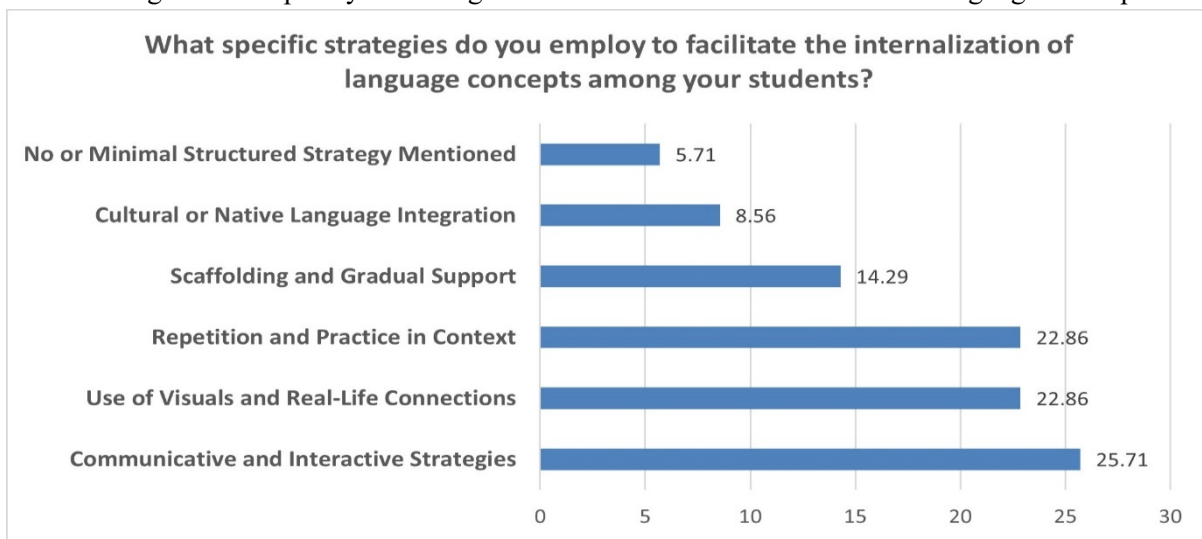
Table 3 and Figure 2 indicate that the primary strategy teachers employ to encourage independent thinking is the use of open-ended questions combined while support is gradually removed 37.14%. Additionally, promoting student expression through discussion, debate, and idea sharing accounts for 25.72%, while peer collaboration to build independence and autonomy represents 17.14%. Furthermore, some teachers also employ "Scaffolding and Task Structuring Toward Autonomy 11.43%, and "Rewards and Responsibilities" 8.57% to slowly build up students' independence and offer incentives to take ownership of their thinking and learning.

Table 4: Frequency Table for Strategies to Facilitate the Internalization of Language Concepts

<b>11.What specific strategies do you employ to facilitate the internalization of language concepts among your students?</b>		
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Communicative and Interactive Strategies	9	25.71
Use of Visuals and Real-Life Connections	8	22.86
Repetition and Practice in Context	8	22.86

Scaffolding and Gradual Support	5	14.29
Cultural or Native Language Integration	3	8.56
No or Minimal Structured Strategy Mentioned	2	5.71

Figure 3: Frequency of Strategies to Facilitate the Internalization of Language Concepts



The results in Table 4 and Figure 3 show that teachers use key strategies to help students internalize language concepts. The most common approach is the use of communicative and interactive strategies 25.71%, showing conversation and real use of language followed by repetition and practice in context, and the use of images and familiar examples, both at 22.86%. The figure also shows that only 14.29% of teachers use ‘Scaffolding and Gradual Support’ build confidence and skill over time, whereas, 8.56% of teachers were reported draw on cultural backgrounds to make learning more meaningful. Finally, ‘No or Minimal Structured Strategy’ was mentioned by 5.71%.

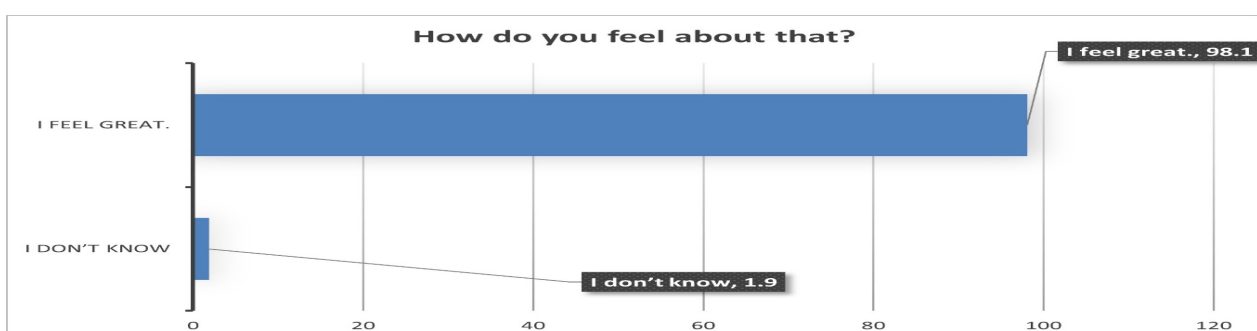
### 4.3 Student Interview Questions and Analysis

This section focuses on presenting the data gathered from the interviews with 105 students. The responses have been organized into themes, with the frequency of each response noted alongside the corresponding themes.

Table 5: Frequency Table for Student Perceptions of Teacher’s Use of Task Breakdown

7.Does your teacher break big tasks into smaller steps?		
Themes	Response	Percentage
Yes	103	100%
I don’t know	2	0%
How do you feel about that?	Response	Percentage
I don’t know	2	1.9
I feel great.	103	98.1

Figure 4: Frequency Table for Student Perceptions of Teacher’s Use of Task Breakdown

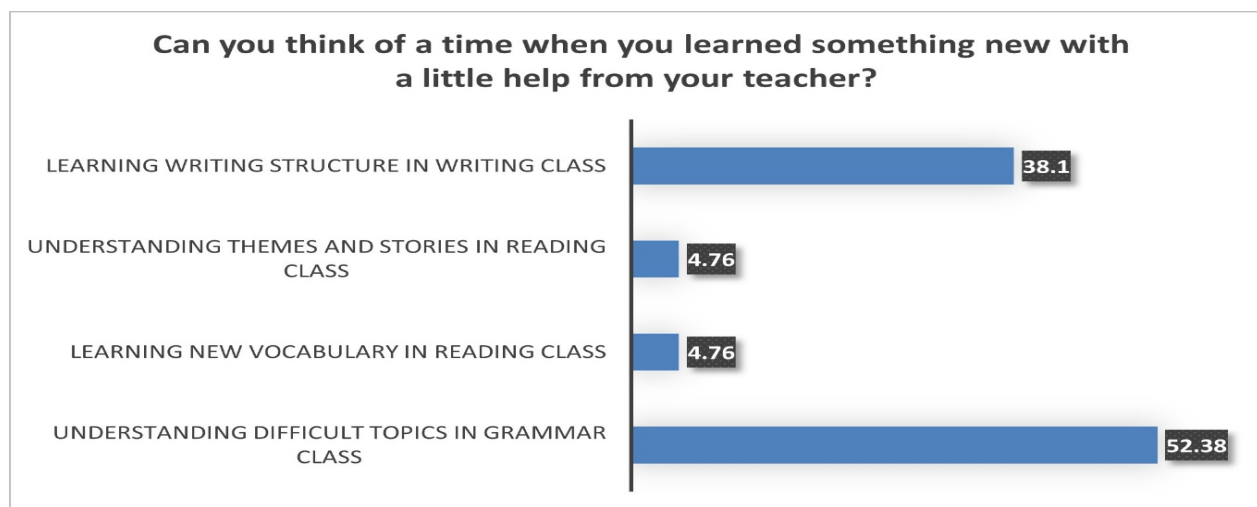


According to Table 5 and Figure 4, almost all students (103) demonstrated that their teacher breaks large tasks into smaller steps for better understanding, with only two students expressing uncertainty. Furthermore, 98.1% of students reported feeling great about this strategy, while just 2% said they didn't know, indicating its effectiveness and appreciation.

Table 6: Frequency Table for Student Experiences of Learning with Teacher Support

8.Can you think of a time when you learned something new with a little help from your teacher?	Response	Percentage
Understanding Difficult Topics in Grammar Class	55	52.38
Learning New Vocabulary in Reading Class	5	4.76
Understanding Themes and Stories in Reading Class	5	4.76
Learning Writing Structure in Writing Class	40	38.1

Figure 5: Frequency Table of Experiences of Learning with Teacher Support



According to Table 6 and Figure 5, when asked about a time they learned something new with their teacher's help, 52% of students identified learning complex grammar topics through exercises. The second most common example, mentioned by 38.1%, was learning to structure paragraphs and essays, while only 4.76% each noted learning new vocabulary or exploring stories.

#### 4.4 Observation

This section presents the data collected from the class observation of the 35 selected English teachers. The purpose behind employing this data collection tool is observation is to see if these teachers truly apply their beliefs in their teaching practices.

Table 7: Frequency Table for Guided Support & Scaffolded Learning

The teacher shows students how to complete tasks before asking them to try it on their own.	Response	Percentage
Observed	29	82.90
Not Observed	4	11.40
Demonstration was shown, but not broken into steps students could follow clearly	2	5.70
Tasks are broken down into clear, step-by-step instructions to make them easier to manage.	Response	Percentage
Observed	28	80.00
Not Observed	5	14.30
Steps were given, but some students still looked confused—unclear instruction	2	5.70

The teacher provides helpful tools like templates, sentence starters, or vocabulary lists to guide students.	Response	Percentage
Observed	26	74.30
Not Observed	6	17.10
Tools provided, but not explained or modeled—students unsure how to use them	3	8.60
As students gain confidence and skill, the teacher gradually steps back and reduces their support.	Response	Percentage
Observed	27	77.10
Not Observed	5	14.30
Support was withdrawn too early; some students struggled without enough practice	3	8.60
The teacher asks questions and offers hints to encourage students to solve problems and find answers on their own.	Response	Percentage
Observed	29	82.86
Not Observed	3	8.57
Questions were mostly closed; hints were limited and not thought-provoking	3	8.57

Table 7 showcases one of the teacher's greatest strengths. The high percentages of Yes across all categories, showing how to complete tasks 82.90%, breaking them into steps 80%, providing tools like templates 74.30%, gradually reducing support 77.10%, and using guiding questions 82.86%, illustrate perfect talents in this teaching technique that builds student skill and confidence.

#### 4.5 Results and Discussion

In educational psychology, Scaffolding is considered an essential concept closely linked to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where communication and cognitive support help learners process language and meaning with guidance from someone more knowledgeable, what he terms it More Knowledgeable Other, MKO (Vygotsky, 1978). In classrooms, scaffolding is understood as form of interactive communication where teachers provide intentional linguistic and cognitive support as they move from reliance on adults to learn on their own and become independent learners. Scaffolding could involve breaking down tasks, modelling possible solutions, giving sentence starters or visual prompts with the aim of gradual withdrawal of support as the learner builds confidence. Furthermore, it allows students to internalize both content and the language skills through well-organized and attentive support, as noted by Gibbons (2002). Therefore, despite being a crucial tool for comprehension, Scaffolding also builds independence and confidence.

In this study, scaffolding emerged as a prominent theme in all four data collection instruments: Table 1 shows that the overall weighted mean of this strategy is 3.62, indicating that the teachers are generally at a neutral level of agreement for entire items related to this variable. While most of the teachers agreed with the statements regarding structural scaffolding and withdrawing support once students become confident. It can be noticed that item 11 regarding the use of cultural scaffolds significantly influenced the overall weighted mean due to limited use of this strategy by only 7 teachers (see Table 4). This means that although structural scaffolding is widely employed by teachers, culturally responsive scaffolding is underutilized despite the fact that it can relate learning to students' prior experiences.

This strategy is also evident in teachers' responses as presented in figure 1. When asked how they modify instruction for students who struggle with complicated tasks, and how they encourage them to think independently after some initial guidance, a vast majority cited step-by-step modeling, scaffolding and gradual withdrawal of support, which correspond to the questionnaire's top-scoring items, one teacher explained:

*"First I teach them how to do it, then we do it together, and finally I ask them to do it on their own."*

However, when a follow-up question was posed connecting the lesson to real-life or interest-specific content, only a small number referred to culturally familiar stories or examples as shown in Figure 2. Hence, these results suggest that while the cultural scaffolding is occasionally used, it is not a regular practice in their approach.

Frequent use of scaffolding was further reinforced in student interviews, particularly structural scaffolding as shown in Table 3. When the 105 students were questioned about whether their teachers broke tasks down into small steps, all of them answered in the affirmative. As one said:

*“I feel less confused when the teacher gives us steps and I can do better,”*

Despite that fact that these responses indicate a clear match between student experience and teacher expectation regarding structural scaffolding, a striking mismatch can be seen with reference to the use of cultural tools. Although, almost one fourth of teachers mentioned utilizing cultural references as shown in figure 28, an overwhelming majority of students, namely 87 students, could not recall specific instances where that occurred, highlighting a notable discrepancy. This raises an important question: Would students engage more and learn better if teachers incorporated cultural references that connect with their everyday lives?

To clarify the above-mentioned discrepancy, the researcher attended 35 class observations. During the observations, a large share of teachers—namely three-fourths—modeled tasks repeatedly before allowing students to work alone, often using supports such as sentence starters, templates, and vocabulary lists. As detailed in Table 7, these tools were frequently applied and effectively incorporated to simplify complex tasks into cognitively manageable steps and teachers used questions and provided hints to encourage students to solve problems on their own. Yet, cultural scaffolding was rarely observed, which stands in contrast to the interview responses from one-fourth of teachers who mentioned frequent use of this approach, which further reinforces the discrepancy between teacher perception, students experience and actual practice. Thus, teachers prioritized structural scaffolding over connecting learning to students' cultural realities.

In general, the findings reveal that scaffolding is well understood and properly implemented, particularly with regard to task analysis, modeling, and gradual withdrawal of support. Its frequent use by teachers was proven to be essential for enhancing student engagement, confidence and comprehension in the classrooms. Having said that, underuse of cultural scaffolding creates a gap, with teachers missing a powerful opportunity to enhance both engagement and meaning in the learning process. While structural scaffolding reduces cognitive load and supports real-time language processing, cultural scaffolding enriches this by linking instruction to students' existing knowledge—enhancing both memory retention and emotional engagement. As Walqui (2006) states, scaffolding is most effective when it not only supports learning but also values learners' identities and life experiences.

## 5. Conclusion

This study confirms the central role of scaffolding in facilitating English learning within the ZPD in Sulaymaniyah's private schools. Teachers employ a diverse range of scaffolding strategies that significantly enhance the learning experience. These include breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps, modelling desired behaviours and language use, providing hints to guide students' thinking, and gradually reducing support as learners become more independent. These strategies are not only integral in bridging the gap between the learner's current abilities and their potential but also empower students to build confidence and develop problem-solving skills. The teachers' ability to adjust their level of support according to the students' evolving needs ensures that learners are neither overwhelmed nor under-challenged, leading to a more effective and personalised learning process. By creating a dynamic and responsive learning environment, scaffolding helps students progress in their language acquisition, making it a crucial component of the teaching and learning process in these schools.

## 5.1 Recommendations

In light of the findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance English language teaching practices and language learning outcomes in Kurdistan's private schools:

- 1-Training programmes should continue to emphasise scaffolding within SCT, ensuring that teachers can effectively tailor their support to individual learner needs.
- 2-The Ministry is advised to develop digital platform to grant teachers access to model lessons regarding scaffolding.

## 5.2 Suggestions for Further Studies:

Further studies could examine the relationship between scaffolding and specific language learning outcomes, such as fluency or accuracy, to provide more targeted recommendations.

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## پراکتیزه‌کافی نه‌سکه‌له له ناوچه‌ی گه‌شه‌پیدانی نزیکا: به‌لگه له وانه‌ی ئینگلیزیدا له قوتابخانه ناحکومیه‌کافی سلیمانی

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### پوخته

نه‌م توژیته‌وه‌یه لیکولینه‌وه له به‌کاره‌یتانی شیوازه‌کافی نه‌سکه‌له ده‌کات که له‌لایه‌ن ماموستایانی ئینگلیزی له قوتابخانه ناحکومیه‌کان له سلیمانی له ناوچه‌ی گه‌شه‌پیدانی نزیک (ZPD) دا به‌کارده‌هینرین. له کاتیکدا که میتودی نه‌سکه‌له به‌شیوه‌یه‌کی به‌رفراوان وه‌ک ستراتژییه‌کی سه‌ره‌کی پیداکوژی بۆ دروستکردنی پردیک له نیوان تواناکانی ئیستای فیرخوازن و گه‌شه‌پیدانی داهاوتودا ناسراوه، لیکولینه‌وه‌یه‌کی سنووردار له شیوازی جیبه‌جیکردنیدا له که‌رتی تاییه‌ت له کوردستان و به‌تاییه‌ت له شاری سلیمانی هه‌بووه. به‌پیره‌کردنی دیزاینیکی توژیته‌وه‌ی شیوازه‌تیکه‌له‌کان (MMR)، توژیته‌وه‌که داتا چه‌ندایه‌تی و چۆنایه‌تیه‌کان کوده‌کاته‌وه که له ریگه‌ی به‌کاره‌یتانی فۆرمی راپرسی ، چاوپیکه‌وتن له‌گه‌ل چاودیریکردن له پۆلدا. به‌شداربووان بریتی بوون له 35 ماموستای ئینگلیزی و 105 قوتابی پۆلی 6 له 28 قوتابخانه‌ی ناحکمی ئینگلیزی ناو شاری سلیمانی. نه‌نجامه‌کان ده‌ریده‌خه‌ن که ماموستایان تیگه‌شتنیک و په‌پروه‌کردنیک باشیان هه‌یه بۆ له ستراتژی نه‌سکه‌له له وانه‌کانیادا ، وه‌ک شکاندنی نه‌رکه ئالۆزه‌کان بۆ نه‌رکی ساده‌تر، له کاتیکدا نه‌سکه‌له‌ی تاکه‌که‌سی له‌سه‌ر بنه‌مای پیداو‌یستییه‌کافی ههر فیرخوازیک به‌که‌می به‌دیده‌کریت. توژیته‌وه‌که به‌کۆمه‌لیک پیشنیاز و پیشنیاز بۆ لیکولینه‌وه‌ی زیاتر کوتابی دیت. **و‌شه سه‌ره‌کیه‌کان:** زانستی زمانی ده‌رووناسی، ناوچه‌ی گه‌شه‌پیدانی نزیک، نه‌سکه‌له

### ممارسات السقالات التعليمية في منطقة النمو القريب: أدلة في الدرس الإنجليزية من المدارس الخاصة في السلیمانية

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### الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في ممارسات الدعم التعليمي التسقيلي التي يستخدمها معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الأهلية في السلیمانية ضمن إطار التنمية القريبة (ZPD). ورغم أن الدعم التعليمي يُعد على نطاق واسع استراتيجية تربوية أساسية لردم الفجوة بين قدرات المتعلمين الحالية وتطورهم المحتمل، فإن الأبحاث التي تناولت تطبيقه في القطاع الخاص في إقليم كردستان العراق ما تزال محدودة. اعتمدت الدراسة تصميم البحث المختلط (MMR)، جامعة بين البيانات الكمية والنوعية التي جُمعت من خلال استبيانات للمعلمين، ومقابلات شبه منظمة، وملاحظات صفية. شمل المشاركون 35 معلماً للغة الإنجليزية و105 طلاب من الصف السادس الابتدائي في 28 مدرسة أهلية، مع اختيار ستة معلمين من مدرستين لإجراء التجربة الأولية. أظهرت النتائج تكراراً مرتفعاً لاستخدام استراتيجيات الدعم التعليمي التسقيلي، مثل تقسيم المهام المعقدة إلى مهام فرعية أبسط، بينما كان الدعم الفردي المخصص لكل متعلم نادراً. وتختتم الدراسة بعدد من التوصيات والمقترحات لدراسات لاحقة. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** إطار التنمية القريبة، علم اللغة النفسي، التسقيلي