



English teachers' perception and attitudes of scaffolding method in teaching academic writing: An exploratory study at universities in Vietnam

Nguyen Ban Mai¹

Ta Huu Hien^{2,3*}

Nguyen Le Tuong Phuong³



(✉ Corresponding Author)

^{1,2,3}Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Vietnam.

¹Email: mainb@ntt.edu.vn

²Email: thhien@ntt.edu.vn

³Email: nltphuong@ntt.edu.vn

Abstract

The primary aim of this research is to investigate the impact of utilizing the scaffolding method on teaching academic writing in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at universities in Vietnam. This mixed-method study examined the attitudes and perceptions of 88 EFL educators from diverse backgrounds and degree levels who were randomly selected for the research. Methodologically, data were gathered and analyzed using the appropriate methods for each instrument, including a questionnaire and focus group discussion (FGD). Theoretically, the study is a medley of relevant theories and approaches such as Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning, the Scaffolding theory, and the 'High challenge - High support' pedagogy. The results of this study suggest that participants used scaffolding to some extent and had strongly positive attitudes and perceptions regarding its practical aspects; however, the findings also revealed that the surveyed lecturers are deficient in the necessary knowledge and skills. In addition, the study's findings imply that EFL teachers need training on how to properly use scaffolding as a pedagogical strategy to facilitate teaching academic writing to EFL students.

Keywords: Academic writing, Attitudes, EFL educators, EFL students, Focus group discussion, Perceptions, Scaffolding, The 'high challenge-high support' pedagogy, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning, Zone of proximal development.

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Contribution of this paper to the literature

This paper makes a noteworthy contribution by shedding light on the prevailing lacuna in the attitudes and perceptions of the scaffolding methodology employed by Vietnamese instructors while imparting English, specifically pertaining to academic writing. Additionally, the innovative utilization of focus group discussions as a research tool for data acquisition.

1. Introduction

Academic writing represents a pivotal component of higher education, and the acquisition of writing skills stands out as a key element for students to attain academic achievement. However, academic writing is significantly difficult for many students, and it necessitates teachers to use of efficient instructional techniques to aid in students' learning. Scaffolding method, widely recognized as a teaching approach, involves the division of intricate tasks into smaller, more manageable ones, and the provision of support to students as they progress towards autonomous completion of the task.

This research endeavors investigate the attitudes and perceptions of English teachers towards scaffolding method in the context of teaching academic writing. This study is prompted by the imperative method that explores how teachers perceive the efficacy of scaffolding method in augmenting students' writing skills and how they incorporate scaffolding techniques in their pedagogical practices.

Although the scaffolding technique has been shown to be helpful in teaching academic writing, little is known about how teachers see and use this approach in their classes. By offering insights into the attitudes and opinions of English instructors regarding the scaffolding technique in teaching academic writing, this research aims to add to the body of current literature.

The study will use a qualitative approach, and the data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with English teachers working at higher education institutions. Additionally, the study will explore the obstacles that teachers face when implementing scaffolding method and the strategies that they use to surmount such challenges.

The results of this study will shed important light on how the scaffolding approach might be used to teach academic writing. Insights like this can influence instructional strategies at higher education institutions. The study's significance emanates from the fact that it contributes to the literature on effective teaching strategies for academic writing, and it has practical implications for English teachers who desire to improve their teaching practices.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Academic Writing

According to [Graham and Perin \(2007\)](#), academic writing can be conceptualized as a continuum of strategies that range from mechanical aspects to more complex processes of composition writing. Moreover, academic writing is also an important factor in evaluating learners' performance in school, as this form of academic assessment depends heavily on the students' ability to convey their knowledge and develop their cognitive skills through written assignments ([Ali, 2021](#)).

Despite the numerous crucial components of academic writing, students continue to encounter hurdles in translating their ideas into a coherent and comprehensible text. These obstacles stem from learners' capacity to generate and articulate ideas utilizing appropriate lexical resources, grammatical range, and paragraph organization ([Manphonsri, Phusawisot, & Samdaengdej, 2013](#)). Additionally, managing every aspect of cohesiveness and properly organizing data and ideas are both essential components of good writing management. As a result, several studies have emerged to investigate the utility of scaffolding method as a novel pedagogical technique aimed at bolstering learners' writing proficiency.

2.2. Definition of Scaffolding Method

The term 'scaffolding' originally referred to a provisional structure that provides support during the construction or renovation of edifices. In the realm of education, the notion of scaffolding pertains to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which encompasses the fundamental facets of scaffolding for English language learners. This theory underscores the influence of social, cultural, and historical artifacts on a child's cognitive development ([Pathan, Memon, Memon, Khoso, & Bux, 2018](#)). This perspective is buttressed by [Negueruela \(2003\)](#) assertion that the Sociocultural theory furnishes an educational framework for fostering a child's cognitive growth. However, since learning cannot take place in a vacuum, third-party mediation plays a crucial element in the learning process. In 1930, Vygotsky introduced the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to delineate the space in which learning takes place. The ZPD connotes the distance between the level of current development as an autonomous learner and the potential development attained through collaborative problem-solving with a more adept adult facilitator or peers ([Vygotsky, 1987](#)).

Inspired by Vygotsky's work, [Wood, Bruner, and Ross \(1976\)](#) were the pioneers in introducing the concept of scaffolding as a method to reduce the level of autonomy in completing tasks, enabling students to concentrate on demanding skills. They proposed that learners require help through scaffolding throughout the early stages of skill development, which is consistent with Vygotsky's emphasis on the social components of learning. However, as their cognitive abilities become more independent, assistance can be progressively withdrawn.

Based on comparable theoretical frameworks, [Mariani \(1997\)](#) emphasizes the need of both providing "high challenge" and "high support" when scaffolding student learning (see [Table 1](#)). According to his study, students should be given assignments that represent the "high challenge" factor and are beyond their current level of competence. However, such challenges, without appropriate levels of support, can result in frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed. Conversely, assignments that are not sufficiently challenging may lead to boredom and disengagement. Therefore, scaffolding should aim to attain a balance between challenge and support to facilitate optimal learning outcomes.

Table 1. A model of scaffolding as “high challenge, high support”.

High challenge	High challenge
Low support	High support
>>Frustration	>>Engagement
>>Short cuts	>>Transformation
Low challenge	Low challenge
Low support	High support
>>Pointlessness	>>Busy work
>>Boredom	>>Dumbing down

Note: Mariani (1997).

2.3. The Characteristics of Scaffolding Method in Teaching Academic Writing

A substantial body of literature has reported on the positive impact of the scaffolding method on teaching academic writing till this date. Much of this research has focused on identifying the key mechanisms of scaffolding, including (1) enhancing students' interest in the task, (2) simplifying the task to make it more achievable for learners, (3) providing clear guidance to students (4) reducing frustration, and (5) clearly specifying the objectives of the activities (Faraj, 2015; Such, 2021). It has been shown that using scaffolding to teach writing engages students in a positive atmosphere, inspires them to study, and lessens their level of irritation when completing assignments. (Van Der Stuyf, 2002).

Similarly, Schwieter (2010) concluded that scaffolding learners' writing skills is a process where experts assist novice students in achieving a higher level of writing proficiency. Vonna, Mukminatien, and Laksmi (2015) randomized controlled study of scaffolding in EFL writing classes further supports (Van Der Stuyf, 2002) findings, demonstrating that this approach increased students' confidence and commitment to writing. Collectively, these studies highlight the critical role of scaffolding techniques in developing learners' writing abilities.

2.4. Teachers' Perspectives of Scaffolding Method

Recent research has begun to explore the effectiveness of scaffolding methodology from the perspective of EFL teachers. Nasr, Bagheri, Sadighi, and Rassaei (2019) conducted a study which examines EFL educators' perceptions of assessment for learning (AFL) in the context of scaffolding practices. While the study is limited to AFL, it presents an opportunity to explore EFL teachers' broader perspectives on the scaffolding paradigm. Troudi and Maazoun Zayani (2020) highlights the importance of scaffolding for instructors to improve their teaching abilities is also highlighted in the study once they have mastered the theoretical underpinnings of this method.

Similarly, Aguilar (2020) academic literature on the impact of scaffolding on English as a Second Language (ESL) students identifies two hypotheses: the input hypothesis and the affective filter by Karshen (1987). According to the input hypothesis, learning is most effective when learners' current level is identified and one level of difficulty is added, while the affective filter suggests that language acquisition cannot occur if the learner's cognition is blocked. Therefore, the affective filter must be lowered or removed to facilitate language acquisition. Both of these hypotheses highlight the need of 'proper scaffold' during the learning process.

In this research a useful framework is developed to support ESL students' thinking, Gunawardena, Sooriyampola, and Walisundara (2017) supports the notion that developing a proper pedagogical framework of scaffolding recognition is the first requisite stage to assist students in cultivating their critical thinking. An evaluation of undergraduate students' listening skills in relation to the scaffolding technique used by their instructor during the learning process highlighted the need for further research in other English language skills. Specifically, educators can be interviewed to gain insights into their perspectives and approaches regarding scaffolding strategies.

The previous study's concluding remarks suggested that additional research in various technical English courses across departments is required, particularly with a focus on communicative skills, particularly listening skills, through interviews with instructors to explore their perspectives and strategies regarding scaffolding methods. (Taghizadeh & Saadatjoo, 2021). However, these studies are not expected to concentrate on writing proficiency. Rather, the recent work of Awadelkarim (2021) has attempted to examine the efficacy of scaffolding through the perspectives of ESL instructors. By utilizing qualitative research methods such as introspection and Focus Group Design (FGD), the study illustrates the cognitive states of EFL teachers, indicating a gradual decline in their confidence levels when it comes to practical and pedagogical scaffolding.

2.5. Research Gaps

The studies of scaffolding method have not only focused on its impact on learners, but also on their perceptions of the approach. Purnomo and Yuyun (2019) conducted a hybrid research study to explore students' perspectives on the beneficial impacts of direct scaffolding instruction in the classroom. It is suggested that similar research should be conducted to gain a better understanding of EFL educators' perspectives on scaffolding implementation, particularly in the context of teaching Academic Writing.

Moreover, many other studies have delved into the technological dimensions of scaffolding from students' beliefs. For example, Mohammed (2020) conducted an experimental study to examine the impact of scaffolding on online tasks that enhance the critical writing skills of secondary EFL learners. However, this study solely focused on the students' perspective and did not specifically address the educators' perspective on scaffolding as a tool for developing language abilities beyond academic writing.

Similarly, in the field of online learning, Rapp and Kauf (2018) explored the use of scaffolding through technical assistance provided by Thesis Writer, rather than by teachers. They employed a mixed method explanatory sequential design to examine the topic, collecting data through online surveys and focus group methods from students' perspectives. The findings of their study suggest that the Thesis Writer technology has potential for scaling academic instruction and can effectively scaffold students in enhancing their writing skills.

Overall, while a significant body of literature has examined the impact of scaffolding method on learners, further research is needed to better understand the perspectives of EFL educators on this approach, as well as its broader application in developing language abilities beyond academic writing.

2.6. The Novelty of the Study

The goal of previous parts was to give a brief summary of the many research that have been done on the scaffolding idea while tracing its methodical application to the teaching and learning process. It is apparent that, in the EFL context, the majority of studies have been experimental, investigating the impact of implementing scaffolding strategies in the classroom, yielding positive outcomes. However, few researchers have exclusively focused on educators' perspectives and their knowledge of scaffolding implementation in the teaching and learning process, particularly in the context of teaching Academic Writing.

Although many recent studies have focused on using scaffolding strategies to develop writing skills, there is a gap in research regarding educators' perceptions and awareness of how to appropriately apply scaffolding during the teaching and learning process, particularly in the context of teaching academic writing. The researches conducted by Yu (2004) and Tran and Nguyen (2021) are two examples of research that sought to study the advantages and proper scaffolding practices from a perceptual aspect but did not give enough instruments for assessment. Other studies, such as those by Vonna et al. (2015); Maryantini, Marhaeni, and Dewi (2020) and Padmadewi and Artini (2019), have explored the use of scaffolding in the classroom, but have not focused on educators' perspectives.

Given the numerous studies done on the scaffolding method, it can be argued that EFL educators' perceptions and attitudes towards scaffolding strategies and their use in the teaching process, particularly in the context of academic writing, merit further study in the research field. In fact, previous research has indicated that even some educators may not have a proper understanding of the systematic scaffolding in language teaching. It is important to highlight that extending or removing assistance for teaching depends on the competency and learning preferences of the students, which may be extremely complicated within Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.

Moreover, the method's current literature offers several distinct categories for classifying scaffolding techniques. For example, Tajeddin and Kamali (2020) employed a corpus-based method to define four types of scaffolding in teacher discourse: under-scaffolding, meta-scaffolding, affective scaffolding, and linguistic scaffolding. Although their study employed this novel categorization strategy, it is vital to realize that all ESL instructors may find it difficult to become knowledgeable about the scaffolding approach.

The current study aims to shed light on the viewpoint of ESL educators regarding the advantageous influence of scaffolding on teaching Academic Writing. To accomplish this, the study intends to address the following research questions:

- What are the attitudes and perceptions of English educators in Vietnam towards scaffolding in teaching Academic writing?
- How well-versed are they in the use of scaffolding when instructing academic writing?
- What is their perspective on the practical aspects of scaffolding in the context of Academic writing?

By answering these questions, this study strives to contribute to the existing literature on scaffolding by exploring the attitudes and perceptions of ESL educators in the specific context of HCM towards the use of scaffolding in teaching Academic Writing. The study also aims to shed light on how ESL teachers perceive and comprehend the practical applications of scaffolding in the context of academic writing.

3. Method

3.1. Developing a Survey Questionnaire

This study used a mixed-method research strategy, which may provide a more thorough conceptualizing approach than monomethod studies, to address the research objectives. This methodology includes qualitative and quantitative data analysis. A focus group discussion and a designed questionnaire were employed as the main research tools that provide a valid analysis of the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards the Scaffolding method in teaching academic writing. Combining the data generated by these two instruments was also anticipated to increase access to the target groups and reveal discrepancies in the results, both of which would be advantageous for a more thorough knowledge of the study concerns (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

The questionnaire was divided into three main parts: (i) awareness, (ii) perceptions, and (iii) attitudes towards the Scaffolding method in teaching academic writing. The survey questions were designed using a five-point Likert scale, which included 15 items ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The questionnaire was based on the one presented by Awadelkarim (2021), translated into the target language, and expanded on a few key points to better fit the Vietnamese educational environment. Three experienced lecturers in relevant subjects were consulted to validate and modify the questionnaire content. The questionnaire was released on Google Forms, a simple platform for accepting replies from a variety of devices, once the most recent revisions were accepted by the researchers.

In total, 81 responses were collected. To ensure valid data collection, all potential participants were informed about the confidentiality of their information and gave their informed consent before completing the survey. The responses were converted into a spreadsheet for a summary and imported into SPSS 22.0, a statistical software for complex data analysis. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the reliability of the three components: awareness, perceptions, and attitudes, which were found to be 0.827, 0.669, and 0.785, respectively.

3.2. The Implementation of Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Focus group discussions (FGDs) have become increasingly popular as a qualitative approach for capturing rich data by gaining insights into participants' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives towards a particular topic (Kitzinger, 1994). In this study, a total of four video-based FGDs were conducted among four groups of six participants each, who were selected from the research population. The purpose was to facilitate planned

discussions that allowed the participants to share their perspectives on scaffolding in teaching academic writing. Online FGDs were favored over in-person talks because they provided access to participants who were difficult to contact, saved time and money for both sides, and produced more words (Woodyatt, Finneran, & Stephenson, 2016).

After completing the survey questionnaire, 24 participants were invited to take part in the FGDs. To ensure a comfortable and open discussion, the participants in each group were selected based on similar characteristics such as work experience, educational background, and age. All FGDs were recorded with the participants' oral consent and lasted approximately for one and half hour. The discussions comprised of 14 open-ended questions aimed at encouraging active participation and free exchange of thoughts on the common topic.

The process of analyzing FGD data involved three stages, namely, assessing transcripts, coding transcripts using MaxQDA software which is particularly used for qualitative data analysis and it allows the researchers to organize, code, and analyze audio or video data (Kuckartz, 2014), and lastly analyzing responses. These stages will be presented in detail in the following section.

3.3. Participants

The present study involved the participation of 81 English educators hailing from both public and private universities in Ho Chi Minh City. In order to create a sample that accurately represents ESL instructors who are familiar with using the Scaffolding method when instructing academic writing at the tertiary level, the selection process was carried out at random and took into account the variables of age, sex, and years of teaching experience. All participants had a master's degree in education or above, and a sizable proportion had vast experience teaching academic writing courses at their respective schools.

The participants were invited to complete an online survey in Google forms via several popular communication channels such as Google Mail, Facebook Messengers, and Zalo – a leading social messaging platform in Vietnam. After collecting the survey data, a group of 24 participants voluntarily attended a focus group discussion hosted by the researchers.

4. Results

4.1. Survey Results

Question 1: To what extent are the participants aware of the scaffolding method in teaching academic writing?

In the initial part of the survey, the participants were assessed on their understanding of the scaffolding method in relation to its theoretical framework. The results showed that a significant proportion of participants displayed a level of ambiguity regarding their understanding of the concept of scaffolding. More than half of the respondents did not state whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements, which implies that there is a great deal of misunderstanding on the fundamentals of scaffolding.

It is surprising to note that despite the widespread discussion of scaffolding in the educational field, more than 60% of the participants, who had a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience (presumably based on their age), lacked confidence in determining the strategies and constructs of scaffolding as well as its employment in teaching contexts. Only around 3% on average claimed that they had some theoretical knowledge of scaffolding.

Regarding Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) model, which is directly linked to scaffolding, 43.2% of the participants seemed to be unaware of this theory of learning and development. However, almost half of the remaining participants (46.9%) stated that they had the possibility of learning or hearing about the ZPD model. Given the common use of scaffolding in academic writing instruction, this raises questions regarding a situation in which participants may have unwittingly picked up some essential knowledge of scaffolding but are restricted in their grasp of the idea. According to Awadelkarim (2021), inadequate knowledge of the Vygotsky's ZPD theory, which is considered the heart of scaffolding, may result in vague claims from the study subjects.

It is worth noting that the participants were encouraged to provide honest responses, but there were some cases of "Neutral" responses, indicating that their awareness of the scaffolding method remained undiscovered. This prompted the researchers to conduct the focus group discussion. The Table 2 displays the participants' level of knowledge and awareness of scaffolding in percentage.

Table 2. Fundamental knowledge and awareness of scaffolding method in academic writing.

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD
I am well aware of the theoretical frameworks of Scaffolding (By reading some literature in the relevant field)	1.2%	23.5%	55.6%	18.5%	1.2%	3.05	0.72
I know about Vygotsky's ZPD model	2.5%	4.9%	46.9%	43.2%	2.5%	2.62	0.73
I am conscious of Scaffolding strategies for teaching academic writing	2.5%	25.9%	67.9%	3.7%	0.0%	3.27	0.57
I know some constructs of Scaffolding	3.7%	22.2%	65.4%	8.6%	0.0%	3.21	0.65
I know how to build and employ Scaffolding method in teaching academic writing	3.7%	18.5%	69.1%	8.6%	0.0%	3.17	0.63

Question 2: What are the perceptions and attitudes of Vietnamese English educators towards scaffolding in teaching academic writing?

It is noteworthy that there was a much stronger confidence of the participants displayed in their responses for the second part of the survey, as compared to the former. In this part, the main aim was to measure how they

perceive the use of Scaffolding in a pedagogical facet, particularly in teaching academic writing. While few to none “negative” responses were received, more than half of the participants expressed their extreme beliefs on the practical benefits of Scaffolding in academic writing sessions, with 48.1% for each of “strongly agree” and “agree”, they stated that using Scaffolding in classrooms will support learner autonomy; 51.9% agreed on another great benefit that Scaffolding brings about which is to assist students to build on their prior knowledge and facilitate the ability to internalize new information; and the same percentage for those who believe in the effectiveness of Scaffolding for teaching academic writing.

Table 3 demonstrates a strong inclination towards the “positive” end of the spectrum, as nearly three-quarters of respondents (74.1%) expressed a strong agreement with the proposition that they should receive appropriate training in order to implement scaffolding techniques in academic writing classes. This suggests not only that teachers have a significant need for practical scaffolding tools, which could be provided through such training, but also that participants are genuinely interested in this method (97.5% of them, comprising a combination of “Strongly agree” and “Agree”, acknowledged their support for scaffolding in writing teaching contexts).

It is noteworthy that despite the full appreciation for scaffolding expressed by respondents, and the absence of any disagreement with the given items (with 0.0% of respondents marking “Strongly disagree” for any of the responses), there may exist a value-action gap between theory and practice. This disjunction may be observed in participants’ pedagogical practices, which may be inconsistent with their stated beliefs. The next section will provide further insights into the practical aspects of scaffolding as experienced in the teaching of academic writing.

Table 3. Perceptions and beliefs of scaffolding method in academic writing.

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD
I believe the main goal in using Scaffolding for teaching academic writing is to promote learners' autonomy	48.1%	48.1%	2.5%	1.2%	0.0%	4.43	0.61
Scaffolding supports learners build on their prior knowledge and internalize new information	46.9%	51.9%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	4.46	0.53
I think EFL teachers should be trained to scaffold the students properly in teaching academic writing	74.1%	25.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.74	0.44
I am interested in using Scaffolding method in teaching academic writing	53.1%	44.4%	2.5%	0.0%	0.0%	4.51	0.55
I believe that Scaffolding method is useful in teaching academic writing	48.1%	51.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.48	0.50

Question 3: What is their attitude towards the practical aspects of Scaffolding in Academic Writing?

A more profound and deeper understanding of the influence of Scaffolding method on students’ learning process as well as the drive and attitude of the teacher participants towards its usage can be provided partially in Table 4. Generally, the results of the final items aligned with the participants’ claims collected in the previous part, but to a smaller degree. 77.8% confirmed that they have employed Scaffolding as a means of instruction in academic writing sessions; however, this caused an apparent contradiction to their previous statement (only a few admitted that they “know how to build and employ Scaffolding method in teaching Academic Writing”, with 18.5% of agreement and 3.7% of strongly agreement). A large number of the participants appeared to know how to utilize Scaffolding appropriately depending upon the learning levels of students in varied situations: 66.7% agreed that Scaffolding should be tailored for each student; 63% emphasized the importance of providing low achievers with more scaffolding support during the completion of academic writing tasks. The two aforementioned figures, again, display an inconsistency between the teachers’ limited knowledge of Scaffolding and their real practices (only a few claimed they know about its strategies and constructs, with 25.9% and 22.2% respectively), which drew attention to the unconscious Scaffolding employment of the participants in teaching academic writing.

As a whole, the participants expressed a positive attitude towards this method as 0.0% of the results labelled “disagree” or “strongly disagree” for the statement “My use of Scaffolding results in better learning outcomes”. Another interesting finding is that more than a half of the teachers (54.3%) noticed about the gradual withdrawal of Scaffolding to create opportunities for students to self-control their own learning, which, according to De Pol, Janneke, Volman, and Beishuizen (2010), can be explained by the term “transfer of responsibility” implying the shift from teachers’ leading control to student centeredness.

Table 4. Participants’ attitude towards scaffolding method in academic writing.

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD
My use of Scaffolding results in better learning outcomes	27.2%	63.0%	9.9%	0.0%	0.0%	4.18	0.59
I apply Scaffolding in an appropriate way for each student	25.9%	66.7%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%	4.19	0.55
I gradually reduce the frequency of using Scaffolding to promote learner autonomy	12.3%	54.3%	30.9%	2.5%	0.0%	3.76	0.69
I use more scaffolds for the beginners or low-achievers	6.2%	63.0%	29.6%	1.2%	0.0%	3.74	0.59
I practice Scaffolding in academic writing sessions	7.4%	77.8%	13.6%	1.2%	0.0%	3.92	0.50

Overall, the survey's main goal was to assess the degree of three variables: (i) the subjects' knowledge and awareness; (ii) their perceptions and beliefs; and (iii) their attitude towards the use of scaffolding in academic writing instruction. However, this only yielded somewhat reserved responses. In order to gain more specific and

insightful findings, the targeted FGD acted as a sharing forum among some of the participants which will be explored later.

4.2. FGD Analysis

FGD was opted to be the second research tools in the present study allowing the researchers to capture more in-depth qualitative data and dive deeper into the participants' thoughts which would be quite challenging for the use of surveys only. Firstly, the video recordings of the four FGDs were accessed and imported directly to Max QDA. After scanning the discussion transcripts, the analysis process started with summarizing and paraphrasing relevant words and phrases followed by the step of labelling them into themes and sub-themes, as shown in the Table 5.

During the group discussion, the first theme that emerged was related to the contextual background of academic writing in Vietnamese EFL classrooms. This theme generated sub-themes that involved "critical for academic success," "lack of writing skills," and "writing instructions." The teachers agreed that academic writing has immense educational benefits for the development of learners' critical thinking, analyzing, and research skills, which are essential for their intellectual growth.

The discussion also identified typical problems and factors affecting Vietnamese higher education students' academic writing performance. These included a lack of proficiency with academic terminology and syntax, problems keeping an article coherent and cogent throughout, and, more crucially, apprehension about writing large scholarly works in a second language.

To engage learners in the writing process, the group discussed several modes of instructions. The use of topic-based discussion, analysis of writing materials, or review of language patterns and structures during a writing section were identified as helpful in achieving desired outcomes. These instructional practices were seen as scaffolding learners through stages of contextualizing, modeling, negotiating, and constructing, requiring both teachers' guidance and learners' effort (Hyland, 2003).

The group discussion also highlighted the significance of academic writing in Vietnamese EFL classrooms, including its benefits for learners' critical thinking and research skills. The discussion also identified typical problems and factors affecting learners' academic writing performance and suggested instructional practices to help learners achieve desired outcomes.

It would appear that the more experienced teacher participants took over the discussion when mentioning the theoretical facet of Scaffolding from the second theme, "Scaffolding in education". Despite the fact that Vygotsky's ZPD model has always been emphasized as the heart of the scaffolding concept forming the background for numerous psychological and educational studies, most of the participants seemed to have an obvious gap in this knowledge, which can be noticed from the Table 5 results. When shifting to the further explanation of Scaffolding, more contributions from the participants were noted: "Scaffolding is when a teacher acts as a guide and supports students in developing skills from the learnt knowledge"; "What makes Scaffolding so effective is because it builds on the learners' existing knowledge base, without making them get bored", one remarked. As the FGD deepened, another teacher commented his scaffolding strategies and techniques to show how they would facilitate students' writing process:

"I usually apply scaffolding when teaching essays by letting my students discuss questions related to the topic they are about to write. For example, one group will search about some advantages while another group will learn about some disadvantages. After that, I will take note of those ideas on the board; from there, the students can develop ideas by eliciting with questions such as why and how, and then give their own answers before composing an essay. I will of course support them if they get stuck on how to describe a particular idea or how to connect ideas properly."

This sharing stressed the importance of activating students' thinking and writing creatively via sets of classroom activities since learners tend to be more engaged and motivated to think and write in a supportive classroom environment promoting collaboration and communication with peers and teachers (Oglah & Rababah, 2018). Finally, all the participants thrashed out the last theme focusing on scaffolding in teacher-student interactions with the problem of class size highlighted by a few. "Not enough time for practicing and correcting grammar or giving detailed feedback for each student". Oversize classes, in fact, have always been a real challenge for Vietnamese EFL teachers draining their time and effort on class management, regardless pedagogical techniques applied, which may hamper timely support to struggling student. However, the teacher participants all agreed that the instructor's support should be adapted to the student's level of competence for promoting learning autonomy. One senior teacher participant concluded with experiences on how to facilitate students' learning by a student-centered approach, rather than spoon feeding them with new knowledge which would demotivate their learning interest over time. It was worth noting that all the four FGDs indeed succeeded in building up an enthusiastic sharing session among the participants to speak up their different perspectives on Scaffolding, from theories to practices. Table 5 below indicates a short overview of the main points in themes and sub-themes.

Table 5. Thematic analysis.

No.	Themes	Sub-themes
1	Academic writing in Vietnamese EFL context	a. Critical for academic success b. Lack of academic writing skills c. Writing instructions
2	Scaffolding in education	a. Vygotsky's Zone of proximal development model (ZPD) b. Scaffolding as a supporting method
3	Scaffolding for teaching academic writing	a. Facilitate the writing process b. Scaffolding strategies and techniques during an essay writing lesson
4	Teacher-student interactions during scaffolding	a. Problem of class size b. The amount of support c. Promote learning independence

Generally, the teacher participants expressed positive attitudes and favorable opinions towards Scaffolding and appreciated its effectiveness in learning and teaching process, despite the probably insufficient relevant knowledge of Vygotsky's ZPD model. Despite the survey findings showing a lack of awareness of the theoretical frameworks for scaffolding, it was suggested via the focus group discussion (FGD) that there is probably unconsciousness among the teachers in the implementation of scaffolding for academic writing sessions. It is also noteworthy that the participants appear to know how to build up scaffolding support appropriately for the students possessing distinct levels of academic performance in order to avoid the problems of spoon feeding and lack of learning autonomy.

Most importantly, the current study highlights the need of properly implementing scaffolding methodologies in academic writing instruction due to its useful advantages in bridging the gap between students' prior knowledge and new information. Offering educators professional development training courses that enable them to share experiences with groups of novice and expert educators as well as being well-equipped with modern pedagogical techniques to deal with ongoing problems faced in their own teaching context is probably one of the efforts being made.

5. Conclusions

In the last two decades, a vast number of studies containing rich clarifications of the conceptual and theoretical aspects of Scaffolding has become widely acknowledged in educational and psychological fields. Nevertheless, the utility of scaffolding in EFL contexts is too broad to fully elaborate its pedagogical implications from teachers' perspectives. The present study attempts to fill this gap by addressing the exploration of perceptions and attitudes of English teachers towards the use of Scaffolding method in teaching academic writing at tertiary level. An investigation of 81 English instructors from various colleges in Vietnam was conducted using a survey questionnaire and focus group discussion (FGD) in order to acquire more noteworthy insights into the researched teachers' individual experiences. The collected data went through SPSS followed by a set of analyzing tools, which then revealed how the participants would perceive the concept of Scaffolding in theories and real practice regarding teaching Academic Writing skill.

6. Limitations and Delimitations

Findings of this study are limited by various factors. First of all, the major investigation in this study emphasized on EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes of scaffolding method in Academic writing, and did not include the learners' which would have been provided more generalizable results and fully reflected the complex perception system of the users of this method. Second, in addition to the instruments used to collect data, such as questionnaires and FGD, other instruments should be taken into consideration to improve the accuracy of the overall situation and aid researchers in considering previously unconsidered study directions. For example, observation may be taken into account.

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