



Original Research

Scaffolding Strategies and Implementation Challenges in Ethiopian Primary EFL Classrooms: Insights from Resource-Constrained Contexts

Mitiku Tasisa Dinsa* & Habtamu Adem Yassin

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Wolkite University, Ethiopia

Abstract

Scaffolding techniques are crucial in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom because they enable learners to complete tasks that surpass their current level of proficiency. In Ethiopian primary schools with chronic linguistic, pedagogical, and contextual obstacles, appropriate scaffolding techniques can facilitate effective language acquisition and learner development. This study analyzed the scaffolding techniques used by English teachers and identified obstacles in their application. In this research, a mixed-methods design was used to collect data from 96 primary school English teachers. The results showed that teachers most frequently used modeling (mean score of 4.42) and feedback (mean score of 3.20). The implementation of scaffolding techniques was hindered by large class sizes, a lack of educational materials, limited professional training, and wide disparities in students' proficiency levels. These factors made learning less effective. While teachers acknowledge the significance of scaffolding, institutional and teaching obstacles prevent its practical application.

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*Corresponding
Author:

Mitiku Tasisa Dinsa
E-mail:

mitiku1tasisa@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Scaffolding in second and foreign language learning is grounded in the principles of sociocultural theory (Alghamdy, 2024; Alrwali et al., 2020; Khatib & Kardoust, 2022; Tajeddin et al., 2020). Scaffolding enables learners to achieve beyond their independent capabilities through temporary help from teachers, peers, or more proficient individuals. As this support is gradually withdrawn, learners acquire the necessary forms and strategies of the language, thereby achieving autonomy, self-regulation, and independent use of the target language (Li & Zou, 2021; Tilahun & Mezgebu, 2024).

In EFL situations, scaffolding is an educational technique that provides learners with

the necessary support for their educational and socio-cognitive development. Scaffolding includes strategies such as modeling, guided practice, feedback from teachers and peers, and visual materials and other learning resources (Fajrin & Sunra, 2024; Tajeddin et al., 2020).

Research in EFL contexts has consistently demonstrated that scaffolding significantly enhances students' language development and overall learning outcomes. For example, studies showed that incorporating scaffolding tools, such as graphic organizers, charts, and other visual aids, greatly improved reading comprehension compared with lessons without this support (Kardoust, 2024; Kim & Hannafin, 2021; Farrelly

Mitiku & Habtamu., & Sinwongsuwat, 2021). Similarly, scaffolding in writing tasks, particularly in cognitively demanding genres such as argumentative essays, has been seen to enhance coherence in the writing of students and to trigger higher-order thinking skills of students (Fajrin & Sunra, 2024; Li & Zou, 2021; Tajeddin et al., 2020).

In-country evidence also supports the effectiveness of scaffolding in Ethiopia. A quasi-experimental study with Grade Four students found that teacher scaffolding significantly improved oral reading fluency (Enyew et al., 2015). In the tertiary level, research at Wollega University identified different scaffolding strategies used in EFL writing classes; these included questioning, recasting, feedback, praise, student participation, and strategic use of learners' L1 (Gudina & Wakuma, 2022). Overall, the findings from these studies thus confirm that scaffolding positively influences EFL learners' performance across skills and educational levels.

Aside from the research done in Ethiopia, recent qualitative studies conducted in resource-constrained primary EFL classrooms have demonstrated that learners respond positively to modeling, guided practice, interactive dialogue, and visual aids, among other scaffolding strategies. However, teachers find implementing the strategies hard due to large-sized classes, mixed abilities of classes, limitations of resources, and lack of enough time (Abdala & Hamdan, 2021; Chairinkam & Yawiloeng, 2024; Ding et al., 2023; Zhang & Singh, 2025). This has come to indicate that scaffolding success really depends on contextual factors such as class size, availability of resources, and teachers' capacity in using scaffolding techniques.

The lack of research regarding how the use of scaffolding has been adapted by primary EFL teachers in under-resourced contexts is largely due to the fact that research has focused on secondary and tertiary education instead of primary level education. For example, a study conducted by Gudina and Wakuma (2022) at Wollega University found that when teachers failed to adapt to the learning needs of students, it led to poor academic

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July –Sep, 2026, 15(3), 111-128
performance. Other large-scale studies also indicated that very few primary EFL teachers use learner-centered instructional methods. Therefore, the investigation of how primary EFL teachers have adapted scaffolding in an under-resourced setting is important, as it informs future teacher training, curriculum design, and policy for improving academic performance.

Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness of scaffolding as a teaching approach in EFL is recognized. It helps learners perform difficult tasks, improve reading and writing skills, enhance motivation, engagement, and autonomy (Abdul-Majeed & Muhammad, 2015; Gudina & Wakuma, 2022; Hassen et al., 2023; Rashtchi, 2019; Tilahun & Mezgebu, 2024). Research conducted in Ethiopia has leaned towards its effectiveness in different schools. Studies indicate that scaffolding improves oral reading fluency of primary school learners and writing abilities of secondary school students (Enyew et al., 2015; Gashaye & Muchie, 2021).

Recent studies focusing on scaffolding have uncovered its efficiency. However, evidence shows there are gaps in this regard. For example, most studies have taken place in schools with appropriate facilities and environments, such as limited class sizes, adequate learning materials, and qualified staff. Therefore, very few studies have investigated the usage of scaffolding techniques in large, under-equipped primary EF/EFL classrooms in Ethiopia. Other available studies show that interactions between teachers and students are not always effective or adequate (Gudina & Wakuma, 2022). Furthermore, there is still not much research devoted to the issue of how teachers cope with such obstacles as large numbers of students, differences in levels of proficiency among them, lack of materials, and other organizational problems (Alrawili et al., 2020; Chea & Kuon, 2024; Farrelly & Sinwongsuwat, 2021; Shahidzadeh et al., 2022). The same situation is observed in the situation concerning the long-term influence of scaffolding on learner autonomy and participation.

In order to bridge these gaps, the current study explores scaffolding techniques used and the difficulties faced in their use in Ethiopian primary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The objectives of this research include: (1) identification of the types of scaffolding deployed by teachers; (2) investigation of adaptation of these techniques in light of contextual factors like the size of classes, the available resources, and the level of students' English language proficiency; (3) examination of the main obstacles to effective scaffolding; and (4) assessment of the ways in which scaffolding can support the development of learner autonomy, engagement, and language abilities.

Research Questions

1. What are the most frequently employed scaffolding strategies by EFL teachers in Ethiopian primary schools?
2. What challenges do Ethiopian primary EFL teachers encounter while using scaffolding techniques, and how do these challenges impact the effectiveness of the scaffolding techniques being utilized?
3. To what extent do EFL teachers perceive scaffolding strategies as effective in promoting students' learner autonomy, classroom engagement, and English language development in Ethiopian primary schools?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

Through a descriptive research design, the study explored the scaffolding techniques used by EFL instructors as well as the difficulties faced in implementing these techniques in some primary schools in Ethiopia. The descriptive research design was appropriate as it permitted an in-depth exploration of instructors' teaching practices and experiences that provided an in-depth description of the strategies adopted and the contextual variables affecting their efficiency.

Participants and Sampling Techniques

A total of 96 EFL teachers from 20 public primary schools in Central Ethiopia's East Gurage and Gurage Zones were involved in the study. Eight of these schools are located in East Gurage and twelve in Gurage. The participating schools were selected through purposive sampling involving a total of nine rural and eleven urban schools. These were selected for their better instructional resources, competent teachers, and status as modern public schools according to the Ethiopian Ministry of Education's (2022) input-process-output approach to evaluating primary education.

Considering that the total number of EFL teachers in the selected schools was not very high, comprehensive sampling was applied so that all the selected school EFL teachers were given the opportunity to participate in the study.

Classroom Observation

To thoroughly study the application of scaffolding techniques by Ethiopian primary EFL educators, a structured observation protocol was designed. The protocol helped the researchers to record the frequency and types of scaffolding methods used, evaluate the level of involvement and learning of students, and determine the factors affecting the application of the strategies.

In order for the observation checklist to be effective, it needed to comply not only with practical requirements, but also be grounded in the theoretical knowledge of scaffolding. Hence, the checklist is built on the foundations of the previous theoretical and practical studies (Shahidzade et al., 2022).

Each teacher participated in four observation lessons and was accompanied by two researchers. It was necessary to collect multiple sources of information, use two observers, and record the lessons in order to enhance the reliability of the findings.

Questionnaire

The second technique for data collection was a survey created to find out about teacher self-reported usage of scaffolding strategies, their

views on how helpful those strategies were, and what difficulties they faced while using them. The survey was distributed among the 96 EFL teachers who participated in the research.

The first section of the questionnaire was composed of 30 closed-ended questions relating to the first research question. These items were organized into six dimensions of scaffolding: (1) Modeling (Items 1–5), (2) Guided Practice (Items 6–9), (3) Feedback (Items 10–15), (4) Group Work (Items 16–20), (5) Activation of Prior Knowledge (Items 21–25), and (6) Pre-teaching Vocabulary (Items 26–30). The teachers indicated how often they used each scaffolding strategy and how effective they believed the strategy was on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree).

The second part of the research examined the difficulties that come with applying the scaffolding techniques and responded to the second research question. The questionnaire contained 23 closed questions that looked at how many barriers teachers face, such as big classes, unavailability of learning instruments, differences in language abilities, lack of time, and demands imposed by the curriculum. All collected data were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale from (1- Never) to (5-Always).

In order to deal with the third research question, quantitative data were collected through a structured self-report questionnaire. This tool was developed on the basis of literature on scaffolding, autonomy of learners, engagement, and language development to measure the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of scaffolded instruction concerning the three outcomes.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 items that were in a closed format and categorized into three subscales: the learner autonomy subscale consisted of six items that sought to determine how the participants perceived the influence of scaffolding on the learners' autonomy; the classroom engagement subscale consisted of seven items that dealt with the perceptions of the respondents regarding scaffolding as a tool for enhancing

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July –Sep, 2026, 15(3), 111-128
students' involvement; and the English language development subscale that included seven notions concerning the teachers' opinion on the impact of scaffolding on the acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and general English language proficiency by the learners.

Each of the items was quantified using a five-point Likert scale starting from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), which means that a higher number denotes a stronger perception regarding the usefulness of the scaffolding strategy for ensuring learner autonomy, tackling classroom engagement, and contributing to English language development.

Moreover, there were two open-ended questions which asked teachers to specify the scaffolding strategies they used the most in their EFL classes and discuss the difficulties they faced while using these strategies.

Interview

In-depth interviews were carried out with 20 EFL instructors (one instructor from each school in the sample) who agreed to share their experiences of using scaffolding techniques and various difficulties they encountered during the process. The information collected during interviews complemented the information obtained from observations and questionnaires, allowing for more insight into teachers' methods of work.

The open-ended questions asked during the interview made it possible for respondents to relate their personal stories and views on the application of scaffolding techniques. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the relevant school premises after getting the prior written consent of the teachers and lasted from 25 to 35 minutes. The audio recordings of the interviews were used with the permission of the teachers to ensure the accuracy of information gathered during interviews. An interview guide was created to help standardize the interviews by providing the main issues that need to be covered by the interviewer.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Numerous techniques were utilized in this study to ensure that the study instruments are valid, reliable, and trustworthy. Content and face validity were obtained through expert scrutiny. Two eminent scholars in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) from Jimma University, with PhDs in TEFL and over 20 years of experience in the field of TEFL, were consulted about the classroom observation checklist, questionnaire, and interview guide. They were able to review the tools for their clarity, relevance, comprehensiveness, and construct alignment with each tool's purpose and theoretical framework. Additionally, a measurement expert scrutinized the tools to assess their technical quality, item construction, and validity.

The researchers were able to understand construct validity since the observation checklist and the questionnaire represented the study's research questions and theoretical principles of scaffolding. The observation checklist was developed through known frameworks and empirical research (Shahidzade et al., 2022), thus enabling the study to ensure that each item meets its goals.

To ensure that the instruments were clear, feasible, and practical, a pilot study was performed. The observation tool was utilized with two EFL teachers not included in the actual study. They provided valuable feedback when completing the tool, which allowed tweaking the ambiguous points in the observation criteria. The questionnaire was tested with 12 EFL teachers from Hadiya and Kambata Zones (from the target group not included in the actual study) who provided feedback. As a result, the overall quality of the questionnaire and its items was improved.

The reliability of the questionnaire was verified using Cronbach's alpha. The number on the scaffolding strategies scale was .88, while that from the implementation difficulties scale was .84, which shows that the internal reliability is good. The closed-ended items of the questionnaire were all measured using five-point Likert scales.

To strengthen the reliability of the classroom observations, two trained researchers independently observed each teacher during four classroom sessions over a two-month period. Before the main study, the observers participated in a calibration session using trial observations to establish a shared understanding of the observation criteria and promote scoring consistency. After each observation, the researchers compared their ratings, discussed discrepancies, and reached consensus, thereby enhancing inter-rater reliability. With participants' written consent, all observed lessons were audio-recorded to verify field notes, reduce observer bias, and facilitate more comprehensive data analysis.

To further enhance the credibility of qualitative data, standardized data collection and analysis processes were used. All interviews were performed by one research team following a unified interview approach. Each interview lasted for 25-35 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded after receiving informed consent from participants and later transcribed. Two researchers coded the transcripts independently, resolving discrepancies through discussion until agreement was reached.

Data Analysis

The researchers performed quantitative analysis on the data utilizing IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27.0). Descriptive statistics were employed to determine the scaffolding techniques that were prominently used by the EFL teachers and the challenges faced while implementing these strategies. The analysis was carried out through one-way ANOVA in order to analyze the differences in the use of the scaffolded strategies and the hurdles faced by the EFL teachers according to their teaching experience and the type of school they worked in. In order to apply the statistical tests, the assumptions of both normality and homogeneity of variance were checked.

The qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviewing sessions were processed thematically with the help of the NVivo software package. Apart from recording the interviews in

audio format, it involved verbatim transcription of the obtained audio files and their further import into NVivo for systematic coding. The coding started with creating a coding system that corresponded with the research questions and interviewing guide and included a set of codes that had been derived from the collected data. After that, the researchers made a thematic analysis of all the coded information using a progressive method of constant comparison. In order to increase the reliability and validity of the study, two researchers worked independently on coding and worked out discrepancies through discussions. The derived themes contributed to a better understanding of the way teachers provide scaffolding and the difficulties that arise when implementing this process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1

Types of Scaffolding Strategies used.

Strategy	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Modeling	28	29.17%	4.4	0.89
Guided Practice	15	15.62%	2.8	0.69
Feedback	20	20.83%	3.2	0.70
Par/Group work	13	13.54%	2.4	0.65
Activating Prior knowledge	8	8.33%	1.7	0.60
Interactive activities	6	6.25%	1.5	0.73
Using Visual aids	4	4.17%	2.9	0.70
Prompting	2	2.08%	1.8	0.69

Table 2 indicates that all identified challenges: large class sizes, limited resources, inadequate training, and varying student proficiency were perceived as significant across teachers of different experience levels. Less experienced teachers (1–3 years) reported the highest impact for large classes ($M = 3.8$) and limited resources ($M = 4.1$), suggesting that novice teachers are more affected by these constraints. While all teachers acknowledged inadequate training ($M =$

Results

From Table 1, modeling was more often used as a scaffolding method (29.17%, $M = 4.4$, $SD = 0.89$) compared to guided practice (15.62%, $M = 2.8$) and feedback (20.83%, $M = 3.2$). Pair/group work (13.54%, $M = 2.4$) and visual aids (4.17%, $M = 2.9$) were integrated to a lesser extent, and the effectiveness of the application of visual aids was relatively higher as compared to those for pair/group work exercises. The least frequently used strategies were; activation of background knowledge with 8.33% ($M = 1.7$), interactive activities with 6.25% ($M = 1.5$) and prompting in which it was used by only 2.08% ($M = 1.8$). Therefore, modeling and feedback were the most preferred strategies suggesting a preference to instructionally structured (teacher managed) support, in Ethiopian primary English classrooms.

3.5–3.7) and diverse student proficiency ($M = 3.5$ –3.7) as challenges, the ratings show that experience slightly mitigates the perceived severity of classroom constraints. In general, the findings underscore the higher susceptibility of inexperienced teachers to contextual problems and point out the importance of targeted assistance, resources, and training in improving assistance practices used in Ethiopian primary EFL classrooms.

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics of Challenges by Experience Level*

Challenges	Teacher's experience level	No.	Mean	Standard Deviation
Large class size	1-3	28	3.8	0.12
	4-7	36	3.4	0.82
	>8	32	3.2	0.74
Limited Resources	1-3	34	4.1	0.10
	4-7	33	3.9	0.92
	>8	29	3.7	1.18
Inadequate training	1-3	30	3.7	0.91
	4-7	28	3.5	0.84
	>8	28	3.6	0.72
Varying Student Proficiency	1-3	34	3.7	0.84
	4-7	31	3.6	0.70
	>8	31	3.5	0.66

As identified in Table 3, rural school teachers have higher mean scores than urban school teachers across all four areas of challenge. Limited resources were perceived as a more significant problem than in urban settings at $M = 4.0$ compared with $M = 3.8$, while inadequate training was at $M = 3.9$ compared with $M = 3.4$. Somewhat greater concerns were also reported for larger class sizes, $M = 3.7$ compared with $M = 3.5$, and

differences in student proficiency, $M = 3.6$ compared with $M = 3.5$. For the limited resource variable, the standard deviation for rural settings was much lower, $SD = 0.11$, indicating a strong consensus. The findings from this ensure that rural teachers experience more significant teaching challenges on account of the environmental setting.

Table 3*Descriptive Analysis of Challenges by School Type*

Challenges	School type	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Large Class Sizes	Countryside	46	3.7	0.91
	City	50	3.5	0.80
Limited Resources	Countryside	46	4.0	0.11
	City	50	3.8	0.82
Inadequate training	Countryside	46	3.9	0.91
	City	50	3.4	0.70
Varying Student Proficiency	Countryside	46	3.6	0.72
	City	50	3.5	0.813

From Table 4, large class size ($p = 0.008$) and scarce resources and inadequate training ($p = 0.020$ and $p = 0.016$), respectively, are significantly different between teachers with 1–3 years of experience and more experienced teachers. Less experienced teachers encounter greater issues in such cases, when considering teachers' perceptions. On the other hand, the

groups were similar regarding the perceived gap in learner proficiency ($p > 0.05$). Large class sizes affected novice teachers to a greater degree, while resource and training concerns had a slight decrease with experience. Nevertheless, all levels reported gaps in learner proficiency as a common challenge.

Table 4*T-Test Results for Challenges by Experience Level*

Challenges	Group comparison	T-value	p-value
Large class size	1-3 Years vs. 4-6 Years	1.67	0.100
	1-3 Years vs. >8 years	2.75	0.008
Limited Resources	1-3 Years vs. >8 years	1.30	0.197
	1-3 Years vs. 4-6 Years	2.45	0.020
Inadequate training	1-3 Years vs. >8 years	1.27	0.183
	1-3 Years vs. 4-6 Years	2.35	0.016
Varying Student Proficiency	1-3 Years vs. 4-6 Years	0.72	0.470
	1-3 Years vs. >8 years	1.18	0.242

Table 5 presents the One-way ANOVA results comparing challenges faced by teachers in countryside and city schools. No significant differences were found for any challenge: large class sizes ($F = 1.82$, $p = 0.175$), limited resources

($F = 1.36$, $p = 0.128$), inadequate training ($F = 1.21$, $p = 0.198$), and varying student proficiency ($F = 1.20$, $p = 0.281$). These findings indicated that EFL teachers in both rural and urban schools faced comparable challenges.

Table 5*One-way ANOVA Results for Challenges by School*

Challenges	School type	f-value	p-value
Large class size	Countryside	1.82	0.78
	City	1.84	0.175
Limited Resources	Countryside	1.36	0.200
	City	1.34	0.128
Inadequate training	Countryside	1.21	0.198
	City	1.25	0.201
Varying Student Proficiency	Countryside	1.20	0.281
	City	1.23	0.270

Classroom Observation Results

One-way ANOVA results for the challenges faced by teachers in rural and urban schools. No observed challenge resulted in significant differences: large class sizes ($F = 1.82$, $p = 0.175$), limited resources ($F = 1.36$, $p = 0.128$), inadequate training ($F = 1.21$, $p = 0.198$), or varying student proficiency ($F = 1.20$, $p = 0.281$). This implies that English teachers in both rural and urban schools have similar kinds of

challenges. It therefore follows from the findings that, though core strategies like modeling and feedback were used most often, many of the interactive, student-centered techniques were underutilized; the implication is clear that targeted professional development is necessary in order to achieve a more balanced, effective use of scaffolding in EFL classrooms (**Table 6**).

Table 6*Application of Scaffolding Strategies*

Strategy	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Modeling	23	23.96	3.8	0.91
Guided Practice	16	16.67	2.1	0.83
Feedback	18	18.75	2.6	0.79
Par/Group work	14	14.58	1.9	0.75
Activating Prior knowledge	9	9.38	1.4	0.62
Interactive activities	7	7.29	1.3	0.64
Using Visual aids	5	5.21	1.2	0.61
Prompting	4	4.17	1.0	0.58

Table 7 presents teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of scaffolding strategies in Ethiopian primary EFL classrooms. Overall, the results indicate a high to very high perceived effectiveness across all three dimensions.

Specifically, classroom engagement recorded the highest overall mean ($M = 4.25$), followed by English language development ($M = 4.23$), and learner autonomy ($M = 4.15$). Within these dimensions, teachers most strongly agreed that

scaffolding enhances students' participation ($M = 4.34$) and motivation ($M = 4.28$), and particularly supports vocabulary development ($M = 4.31$), all rated at a very high level.

Therefore, the findings confirm that teachers perceive scaffolding as most impactful in promoting active classroom engagement and vocabulary learning, while also substantially contributing to learners' autonomy and broader language skill development.

Table 7

Teachers' Perceived Effectiveness of Scaffolding Strategies in Ethiopian Primary EFL Classrooms (N = 96)

Scaffolding Dimension	Item	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)	Level of Perception
Learner Autonomy	Scaffolding helps students complete tasks independently	4.21	0.63	High
	Scaffolding encourages students to take responsibility for learning	4.18	0.66	High
	Scaffolding develops students' self-regulated learning skills	4.12	0.71	High
	Scaffolding reduces dependence on teacher assistance over time	4.09	0.69	High
Subtotal Mean		4.15		High
Classroom Engagement	Scaffolding increases students' participation in classroom activities	4.34	0.58	Very High
	Scaffolding enhances students' motivation to learn English	4.28	0.60	Very High
	Scaffolding promotes interaction among students during learning tasks	4.22	0.64	High

Table 7 continues

	Scaffolding reduces student anxiety in English learning	4.16	0.67	High
Subtotal Mean		4.25		Very High
	Scaffolding improves students' speaking ability	4.19	0.65	High
English Language Development	Scaffolding improves students' writing performance	4.17	0.68	High
	Scaffolding improves reading comprehension skills	4.23	0.61	High
	Scaffolding improves vocabulary learning and retention	4.31	0.59	Very High
Subtotal Mean		4.2		Very High

Classroom Observation

Challenges in Implementing Scaffolding Strategies

The observations that were carried out in the classroom show that the teachers of English as a Foreign Language made use of scaffolding strategies, such as modeling, guided practice, vocabulary pre-teaching, activation of prior knowledge, and collaborative learning techniques. But at the same time, the effectiveness of these techniques was influenced by the specific context of their implementation. A number of challenges can be found in the classrooms that were observed.

The size of a class

Classrooms were very overcrowded. It was hard for teachers to control what was happening in the classroom, provide support to different students, make use of formative feedback. Thus, the low ratio of students per teacher made it impossible to create situation for teacher-student interaction, and adapt the assistance given to the learners according to their needs.

The lack of teaching materials

There was a constant lack of teaching aids. The teachers had no option but to use the board in 39 of the lessons to present the new words. Though the teachers tried to use the board to demonstrate the vocabulary, the absence of suitable visual aids made it impossible to use various means of providing assistance.

Restriction on student involvement

Even though a lot of educators carried out pair and group exercises, learning activities lack participation from students. Passive behavior among a good majority of pupils restricted peer-assisting learning opportunities and brought down the effectiveness of collaborative scaffolding. Thus, most of the time interactions in class involved the teacher only rather than active contribution from the learners.

Difference in students' knowledge of English

Differences in the knowledge of English language brought about another problem. In 30 lessons observed, many students found it difficult to grasp information given by their teachers, even after they repeated instruction in both English and the local language. Such difficulties with understanding restricted their engagement with the process.

Time-pressure in teaching

The short period of time allocated for teaching worsened the implementation of scaffolding even more. Approximately 50% of all observed lessons did not present enough opportunities for the proper use of guided practice. Thus learners faced difficulties in utilizing newly acquired language skills.

Variations in Teacher Pedagogical Competence

The teachers had variances in their knowledge and practice of scaffolding strategies. Some teachers

Mitiku & Habtamu.,

were consistent in modifying their teaching according to their students' learning needs while other teachers practiced scaffolding with little or no support to the learners who were struggling. These variations show that teachers need to undergo continuous training on theory and practice of scaffolding.

The observations also revealed some innovative and context-sensitive teaching methods that contributed to learner involvement.

Approximately 20 lessons involved word-to-picture matching in order to help students improve vocabulary. By connecting an image with vocabulary, the learners' prior knowledge was activated, the connections were made stronger, and the vocabulary was retained.

Some teachers also used short dialogues and role-play as activities where immediate feedback regarding students' pronunciation, grammar, language use, etc. was possible.

The inclusion of peer-review activities in various writing assignments was observed in some classrooms. Students were involved in assessing each other's writing by paying attention to grammar and vocabulary, as well as coherence, thus helping them learn cooperatively, reflectively, and independently rather than waiting for teacher feedback. The findings of classroom observations revealed that the teachers of primary EFL in Ethiopia used various instructional scaffolding techniques in their practice. At the same time, proper usage of these tools was limited due to many factors, including large class sizes, lack of resources to teach effectively, students' different levels of proficiency in English, limited time for instruction, and diversified preparation of teachers. Nevertheless, many teachers have shown their flexible approach in utilizing scaffolding techniques within limited resources.

Interview Results

The implementation of Scaffolding Techniques

There was a notable pattern coming out from the interviews which is frequent application of modeling by teachers with the intent of assisting students acquiring foreign languages. Respondents acknowledged the pattern in their actions of

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July –Sep, 2026, 15(3), 111-128
exhibiting accurate use of the language prior to giving assignments to the students for doing by themselves. Teachers noted that modeling was capable of clarifying grammatical elements, structure of sentences, and functions of the language which led to decrease in uncertainty levels of students. One of the teachers stated,

"There is a way a sentence is formed and when it is communicated, students have an idea what needs to be done before attempting to do it." (T10)

Another interviewee similarly stated,

"Repeated demonstrations help students become more certain about conduct." (T15)

Teachers considered modeling as one of the essential teaching techniques for bringing in new forms of language and guiding students toward becoming independent language users. Another important theme was how guided practice was used. The teachers reported using guided practice before letting the students do the task by themselves, as they helped the students through various activities first. The program participants mentioned giving the learners step-by-step recommendations when the students were charged with a task. One of the participants noted that,

"I do the assignments with the students before asking them to do the same kind of tasks alone". (T11)

The teachers believed that guided practice serves as a good intermediary between showing a skill and independent learning by the students.

The interviews indicated that feedback is an important scaffolding technique used by the teachers. The interviewees mentioned giving immediate verbal feedback while performing a classroom task in order to encourage the students when necessary and correct their mistakes. One instructor said,

"Immediate feedback gives way for the students to learn their mistakes before they become fixed." (T13)

Another participant noted,

"Positive feedback allows the students to keep on learning even when they make mistakes." (T18)

Over and over again teachers have pointed out the fact that timely feedback helps learners

Mitiku & Habtamu.,

develop confidence and learn the language constantly.

In addition, the teachers used to say that they activate students' prior knowledge regularly before delivering the lesson. The participants said that finding a link with their previous knowledge allows students to learn new material easily as well as interact with the newly presented lesson. For instance, one instructor noted,

"Before starting a new lesson, I always make sure what the students already know and create a bridge between the old and new." (T12)

The interviewees said that by activating prior knowledge students become more prepared for the lesson.

Collaborative learning was the next most commonly used scaffold. Teachers mentioned doing pair or group tasks to facilitate peer cooperation, discussion and help each other in language learning. One teacher explained,

"Students can learn better when they talk about some ideas with their peers before they make a response to the whole class." (T15)

Teachers were convinced that collaborative tasks enhance students' communication, promote their participation, and reduce anxiety. Pre-teaching key vocabulary was another widely used technique. Participants noted that they presented previously unknown words prior to reading or speaking activities, writing the words on the board, explaining them, and giving examples or pictures whenever possible. The participant stated,

"Teaching important vocabulary before the lesson helps students to comprehend the activities better." (T8)

Teachers mentioned that vocabulary pre-teaching enhances students' comprehension and participation in the lesson.

Several interviewees also stressed the teaching merit of visual material. A teacher noted the limitations of teaching material, but reiterated that charts, photographs, diagrams, and any objects available locally were used as supplemental teaching resources. *"Visual aids help us clarify abstract concepts. When students see photos or real objects, they perceive the meaning of English*

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July –Sep, 2026, 15(3), 111-128
words much faster," was the comment made by one teacher (T9). In general, the interviews revealed that modeling, guided practice, and feedback made up the main scaffolding that primary EFL teachers applied, augmented with other techniques such as prior knowledge activation, group learning, pre-teaching vocabulary, and using visual aids.

Challenges in Implementing Scaffolding Strategies

Despite the teachers' claims of using scaffolding techniques, they described some challenges that got in the way of effective practices.

The first challenge often mentioned was the size of the classes. The participants pointed out that classes consisted of more than 60 students, which made the work of providing individual assistance, monitoring group activities, and checking whether the students understand the lessons very difficult. One interviewee shared the opinion, *"With more than sixty students in one classroom, it is impossible to support every learner equally"* (T16). The participants said that large classes stopped them from having interactive conversations and employing scaffolding techniques.

The second challenge reported was that classroom resources were very limited. The teachers stated that there were not enough books, visual aids, and teaching materials. One interviewee explained, *"Most of the time, the chalkboard is the only teaching resource available, so it is difficult to make lessons interactive"* (T10). According to the interviewees, insufficient resources limited the opportunities for using various methods of scaffolding.

The theme of instruction time limitations also came up as a recurrent point. Participants noted that the obligation to finish the given curriculum led to the lessening of practice opportunities, combined work, and individual feedback. As reported by one interviewee,

"We sometimes need to complete the lesson even when the students would like to practice some

Mitiku & Habtamu.,
more since the syllabus should be completed."
(T17)

Teachers recognized that limited instruction time hindered the gradual shifting of responsibility which is the essence of scaffolding.

Another issue was low motivation of students to participate in various activities. Several teachers reported that some learners were reluctant to take part in discussions, role-playing, and teamwork due to their lack of self-esteem and language limitations. The interviewee said,

"Some students do not say anything during teamwork since they fear they will make mistakes."
(T11)

Teachers thought that limited participation lowered the effectiveness of collaboration in the process of scaffolding.

Lastly, it was deduced that the students' poor command of English contributed to the effective provision of scaffolding. Participants mentioned that many learners could not comprehend the assignments made in the classroom, observe demonstrations, and take part in cooperative teaching and learning. One teacher noted, "*Even after repeating the instructions in English and in the local language, some of the students still cannot understand what they are supposed to do.*" (T19) The teachers stated that these issues often resulted in the necessity to provide instructional support in the form of lower-level explanations, visual support, and assistance from fellow students.

The results of the interviews show that teachers in Ethiopian primary schools always utilize a variety of strategies for implementing scaffolding. However, effectiveness of these strategies is influenced by a number of factors such as large class size, lack of teaching resources, lack of teaching time, lack of students' interest, and wide variability in students' level of knowledge of English.

DISCUSSION

Patterns of Use of Scaffolding Strategies in Ethiopian Primary EFL Classrooms

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July –Sep, 2026, 15(3), 111-128

The results show a distinct pattern in scaffolding strategy use with modeling noted as the strategy most frequently and effectively used, followed by feedback and guided practice. The modeling strategy was reported by 29.17% of teachers, observed in 23.96% of classroom segments, and recognized by 18 out of 20 interview respondents as being crucial in displaying vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation before performing independently. This prevalence indicates that it coincides with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development where demonstration facilitates learners' development toward independence and supports the findings of the research that highlight its capacity to assist in reducing cognitive load and bring the theory to practice in EFL teaching (Alrawili et al., 2020; Alghamdy, 2024).

Feedback and guided practice were significant elements of the teaching process, albeit less than in regards to the modeling method. According to the results of the questionnaire, 20.83% of teachers regularly used feedback while 15.62% applied guided practice. These results correspond with observations in classrooms (18.75% and 16.67%, respectively) and interviews (15 teachers for feedback and 16 for guided practice). Feedback was reported as essential for correcting mistakes, reinforcing the material taught, and motivating students, which is in accordance with Abdala and Hamdan (2021). Guided practice was seen as having the role of a bridge between teacher modeling and independent execution.

However, the use of feedback and guided practice varied considerably in different classrooms. This fact seems to be shaped by the contextual factors such as big classes, the lack of teaching-related resources, unprepared education, and strict curriculum deadlines. Modeling was used a lot indicating its efficacy and suitability for constrained teaching realities but demonstrating the reliance on teacher-centered approaches making it difficult for students to receive necessary educational support.

According to the results of the study, it was found that the primary scaffolding strategies

implemented in Ethiopian primary EFL classrooms are referred to as modeling, feedback, and guided practice, where it should be highlighted that the most widely applied strategy is modeling. The results show the importance of targeted professional development, provision of adequate instructional materials, and flexibility of curriculum to implement more effective learner-centered approaches to scaffolding in less resourceful educational settings.

Limitations of Effective Scaffolding in EFL Classrooms

The study results show a number of interconnected limitations that are detrimental to the appropriate utilization of scaffolding methods in primary EFL schools in Ethiopia. They are large class sizes, scarce teaching resources, insufficient teacher training, time constraints, and various levels of students' proficiency. Altogether these elements lower teachers' abilities to give prompt, active, and flexible assistance needed for effective scaffolding.

The large class size seems to be the most important obstacle, as the class size often equals more than 60 students. Consequently, this overcrowdedness prevents the implementation of individual attention, cooperation, and prompt feedback and makes the teaching process at least partly directed by teachers. This result is supported by earlier evidence claiming that the large class size hinders individualization of instruction and decreases the effectiveness of the application of scaffolding approaches (Alghamdy, 2024; Muhammad et al., 2025; Van Driel et al., 2018).

As a limitation, instructional materials, particularly in rural institutions made effective scaffolding techniques ineffective. The absence of supplementary resources such as visual support, realia, and aids for instruction minimized the chances of applying the method of multimodal and concept-based instruction. Beginners were the most impacted, for they had a limited number of techniques for adjusting teaching in low-resource situations.

Another significant limitation was insufficient pedagogical preparation. Many teachers claimed

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July –Sep, 2026, 15(3), 111-128

that they had little training in the proper use of techniques for scaffolding, including contingent support, fading, and formative feedback. The absence of these skills made it impossible for teachers to manage collaborative learning successfully. Furthermore, there were factors related to students, especially different levels of language proficiency and motivation that influenced the effectiveness of scaffolding. According to the teachers, students who were not proficient in English and were demotivated did not react well to the method, which makes the method less useful.

Ultimately, the time limitations of the curriculum affected the opportunity for scaffolding to be used. Teachers cited the time pressure that they faced, which led to the shortening or skipping of necessary steps such as guided practice and feedback. This supports previous studies that found that effective scaffolding can only occur if there is sufficient time provided for teaching practices.

The study suggests that although it is well known that scaffolding can be useful, its effective application is hampered by a number of factors.

Teachers' Perceived Effectiveness of Scaffolding: A Contextual Interpretation

The results point out that Ethiopian primary EFL teachers have a generally positive attitude regarding the use of scaffolding. High to very high scores were obtained from the values calculated for the three constructs of the teaching methodology; learner autonomy, classroom engagement, and English language development. Thus, it can be concluded that scaffolding is considered one of the important instructional methods for effective language learning, not just a supplementary method.

Among the three aspects of the methodology, classroom engagement was given the highest score ($M = 4.25$), specifically about encouraging learners to engage more in learning activities ($M = 4.34$) and motivating them ($M = 4.28$). This shows that the importance of scaffolding in creating engaged and participative classrooms and

reinforces what has been said by sociocultural theory, according to which learning takes place as a process mediated and assisted by other people.

Similarly, teachers indicated a very fulfilling effect regarding English language development ($M = 4.23$), specifically in terms of vocabulary acquisition and retention, which was rated the highest ($M = 4.31$). This means that this indicates the importance of scaffolding in enhancing vocabulary acquisition that serves as a basis for overall language skills such as speaking and writing. The findings are in accordance with previous studies stating that mediated instruction, modeling, and visual support can prove to be useful in improving language comprehension (Farrelly & Sinwongsawat, 2021; Kim & Hannafin, 2021; Rahma, 2020).

As for student autonomy ($M = 4.15$), teachers also observed that scaffolding is good for building autonomy, especially for the development of self-regulated learning. However, its lower score may indicate that this type of learning might not be observed immediately. This corresponds to Vygotsky's ZPD theory, which claims that students become independent with time (Li & Zou, 2021).

The slightly lower score may have to do with the context, for example, big groups and limited time for teaching and learning. As a result, the findings indicate that educators view scaffolding as particularly important as far as obtaining immediate and noticeable results such as student engagement and vocabulary growth are concerned, but they regard its role in attaining autonomy as being less significant. This tendency mirror the teaching methods of Ethiopian primary schools, which tend to focus more on observable students' participation and language production.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded through the study that scaffolding is an instructional method that is widely used and appreciated in Ethiopian primary EFL2 classrooms, with the use of modeling technique being the most commonly used strategy, followed by feedback and guided practice. Throughout the study period modeling was found

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July –Sep, 2026, 15(3), 111-128
to be consistently used to demonstrate grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, which shows the close relation that the method has with Vygotsky's ZPD. Feedback and guided practices were also applied in the classrooms although not as consistently as the modeling strategy which shows partial use of the interactive and learner-centered scaffolding practices.

Additionally, the research findings indicated that there are diverse challenges to the effective application of this instructional method. Such obstacles as classes being too big, not enough instructional resources available, lack of teacher training, time limitations imposed by the curriculum, etc. contribute to limiting the effectiveness of scaffolding as it lacks personalized assistance and interaction.

In spite of the above limitations, the educators evaluated scaffolding as an extremely useful measure to improve classroom involvement, vocabulary acquisition, and independence of learners, noticing that the greatest influence of scaffolding was seen in such measures as engagement and vocabulary acquisition. Nevertheless, independence of learners has remained poorly developed, thus showing that long-term autonomy has not been achieved yet in educational practice.

As a result, the researchers concluded that, even if scaffolding has been evaluated positively from the pedagogical standpoint, the effectiveness of this method depends on the conditions under which it is used.

Recommendations

The study shows the necessity for improving continuous professional development programs geared towards teachers, focusing on the specific need for the application of advanced scaffolding techniques, including contingent support, fading, differentiation, and formative feedback. Policymakers should give priority to the strategies designed to eliminate overcrowded classrooms; also, where reducing the number of students is not possible, teachers should be provided with effective classroom management techniques, such

Mitiku & Habtamu.,

as group work, peer learning, collaborative approaches, and systemic data gathering about students' progress. There should also be improvements in the provision of access to the affordable and available to the local public tools and techniques connected with the teaching and learning materials utilized in advanced scaffolding. Moreover, issues related to giving enough time to learning and practicing processes should be reconsidered. Besides, future programs focused on teacher education and professional development should consider the significance of learner-centered approaches as the basis for fostering the autonomy and self-regulation of the students. Lastly, future reforms in education should concentrate on the necessity of applying the frameworks of scaffolding, proposed as context-sensitive, which are in line with the realities and limitations for ensuring the implementation of the existing practices of scaffolding.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Mitiku Tasisa Dinsa: Conceptualization, Data Collection, Model Development and Analysis & Writing Original Draft, Supervision. **Habtamu Adem Yassin:** Model Validation, Supervision and Editing.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors indicated no conflict of interest regarding this article.

Ethical Approval Statement

All the ethical approvals were obtained from the Research Review Board of Wolkite University. The Research Project has been approved by WKU-RERC in its meeting held on January 23, 2025, with the Reference Number WKU-RERC/0281/2025 regarding research involving human subjects. All the laws and guidelines of Wolkite University and other authorities with regards to research involving human subjects were followed without any exception. All the participants have signed an informed consent in the written form before the data collection.

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., July –Sep, 2026, 15(3), 111-128

Data Availability

The data set used in this research can be provided by the corresponding author in a reasonable period of time.

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