Exploring the Effect of Instructional Scaffolding on Foundation Level Students' Writing at the City University College of Ajman: A Case Study

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Abstract
The present research is a small-scale case study with a 15-week intervention aiming to identify lower intermediate language learners' major writing challenges and explore the effect of instructional scaffolding on their writing skills and abilities. Scaffolding is central to the broader theories of constructivism and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Nine Foundation Level students enrolled in an Intensive English Program at the City University College of Ajman, United Arab Emirates, participated in this study. This study is observational, descriptive, and interpretive. The researcher used three qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments: pre-and post-writing tests, a focus-group interview, and a student attitude questionnaire to triangulate and gain reliable, valid data. The findings revealed some major writing issues, including paucity of ideas, lack of grammatical and lexical knowledge, proper organization, and problems with spelling and punctuation. However, the pre-posttest results indicated improved students' writing skills and abilities, mainly in task completion, paragraph organization, lexical range, and writing fluency. The study also finds that students need more time and practice to produce accurate and error-free essays. Accordingly, the researcher recommends engaging students in research-based strategies and activities in all writing phases to raise their awareness of grammatical and lexical mistakes, increase their learning and reflection, and boost their confidence.
Keywords: constructive feedback, interactive strategies, scaffolding, second language, language competence

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Introduction

Teaching writing to ESL students is challenging and complex. Many ESL students enrolled in the Intensive English Program (IEP101) at the college where the researcher teaches experience significant writing difficulties. They lacked the opportunity and support needed back in high school to produce good quality writing. Their poor writing skills prevented them from engaging in successful classroom writing, and they often felt frustrated when asked to write. These students need adequate support and preparation to help them write meaningfully and accurately in English. The literature indicates that effective second language (L2) writing should be cohesive, well structured, and adequately organized (Choi & Wong, 2018; Fareed et al., 2016; Piamsai, 2017; Spycher, 2017). In addition, many studies emphasize the effectiveness of instructional scaffolding in improving students' writing. Scaffolding helps develop students' cognitive, metacognitive, and affective competencies (Choi & Wong, 2018; Melrose et al., 2013; Piamsai, 2017; Walqui, 2006). Therefore, the present study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What writing challenges did the participating students experience?
2. What effect does instructional scaffolding have on student writing performance from their perspectives?

Review of the Literature

Common Writing Difficulties among ESL Learners

Most ESL students have trouble using correct sentence structures and writing coherent and cohesive paragraphs (Ahmed, 2010; Mohseni & Samadian, 2019). Ahmed (2010) explains that "producing a coherent piece of writing is an enormous challenge, especially in one's second language" (p. 82). ESL learners have English spelling, punctuation, and capitalization issues, which often interfere with what the student intends to say (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Ahmed, 2010). Commenting on students' poor punctuation, Adas and Bakir (2013) assert that "several ELLs with Arabic background struggle with punctuation since Arabic has few[er] limitations in the use of commas and periods than English" (p. 255). Furthermore, students' lexical repertory is minimal and often overuses keywords (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Ahmed, 2010; Fareed et al., 2016). First language (L1) interference is another concern; many Arab learners of English tend to think in L1 instead of L2 when they write. This reliance on L1 often leads to confusion and makes their writing hard to read (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Ahmed, 2010). Fragments, run-ons, choppy sentences, clichés, and other sentence-level issues hinder their writing accuracy (Al Badi, 2015, Adas & Bakir, 2013; Piamsai, 2020). Al Badi (2015) and Fareed et al. (2016) single out two writing difficulties EFL students encounter in writing classes. These difficulties include low language ability levels, lack of information about the topic, confusion between spoken and written forms of English, and L1 interference.

Leveling up Student Writing through Instructional Scaffolding

Scaffolding is a teaching method rooted in Vygotsky's learning theory. Scaffolding means providing the necessary guidance and advice to students to improve their knowledge and abilities and approach the targeted mastery level. Once students' learning increases, the teacher should remove their support progressively (Choi & Wong, 2018; Melrose et al., 2013; Piamsai, 2020; Walqui, 2006). The term 'scaffolding' refers to the amount of learning students may register with the help or instruction provided by more capable others (Benko, 2012; Piamsai, 2020).

Scaffolding requires purposeful interaction with content and other people. When teachers tailor their support to students' learning and understanding, the connection between their prior knowledge and the new knowledge is stored in their long-term memory (Walqui, 2006). Therefore, instructors should tailor effective scaffolding to meet learners' needs and enhance their future independence (Benko, 2012; Spycher, 2017). Instructors should also provide scaffolding on-demand as students make headway in their learning and become more autonomous and less dependent on teachers (Walqui, 2006). Similarly, Gibbons (2002) defines *instructional scaffolding* as temporary, purposeful, and responsive support that helps students progress toward new abilities, concepts, or levels of comprehension.

Benefits of Scaffolding

The literature emphasizes the benefits of instructional scaffolding. Scaffolding enhances writing fluency and accuracy, fosters positive interaction and purposeful discussions between teachers and students, and allows constructive feedback from peers and instructors (Melrose et al., 2013; Piamsai, 2020; Spycher, 2017; Walqui, 2006). It also upgrades the quality of students' writing and raises their awareness of how writing works (Spycher, 2017). To incorporate scaffolding in teaching, teachers should consider the following questions: What kind of activities can the students do independently? Which tasks can students complete with help but not on their own? Finally, what type of teacher, peer support, or guidance is required to help students acquire the needed competencies? (Melrose et al., 2013). Commenting on the vitality and the dynamic aspect of instructional scaffolding, Van de Pol et al. (2010) explain:

Because scaffolding is such a dynamic intervention finely tuned to the learner's ongoing progress, the support given by the teacher during scaffolding strongly depends upon the characteristics of the situation like the type of task (e.g., well-structured versus ill-structured) and the responses of the student. Therefore, scaffolding does never look the same in different situations and it is not a technique that can be applied in every situation in the same way (p. 272)

Grounded Theories

Social Constructivism and Knowledge Construction

The present study focuses on the connection between the core concepts of social constructivism and Vygotsky's concept of learning as a social activity. According to the social perspective of constructivism, knowledge is constructed only when interaction occurs between individuals or groups within a community of practice (Richardson, 2003). Teachers negotiate meaning with learners in a constructivist classroom to help them construct knowledge. Depending on their abilities and learning needs, students actively engage with the topic by connecting the new material to prior knowledge, independently or with help from their instructors or peers.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky's (1978) understanding of knowledge construction is that knowledge is created collaboratively within a social group. ZPD means that a more competent learner assists a less competent one in a task or solving a problem. This assistance continues until the less competent student becomes more skilled at an activity previously completed in a group setting. Van Lier (2004) summarized different scaffolding sources in ZPD: assistance from more capable peers or adults, interaction with equal peers, less talented peers, and inner knowledge and experience.

Thus, the learner taps into four sources of scaffolding; from an expert, through collaborating and co-constructing knowledge with peers, assisting less capable peers in their ZPDs, and finally, working alone and relying on one's inner resources (Walqui, 2006; Van Lier, 2004).

Models of Instructional Scaffolding
The mainstream literature suggests different approaches, frameworks, models, or strategies sustain learners' performance in learning English as a second language.

Walqui's Framework
Walqui's (2006) pedagogical framework includes six types of instructional scaffolding: "modeling, bridging, contextualizing, schemata building, re-presenting text [,] and developing metacognition" (p. 170). First, teachers model classroom tasks to increase understanding. Second, teachers activate students' content knowledge by helping them connect new material to their real lives. Their next move consists in contextualizing the tasks in focus to make the academic language more accessible and engaging for learners. Fourth, teachers create conditions for students to connect meanings with knowledge and understanding. Finally, teachers engage students in meaningful language learning activities and instructional conversations. Teachers enhance learners' autonomy at this stage by creating analogies and metaphors based on students' experiences. Meantime, students are encouraged to self-monitor.

Integrative Framework
Van de Pol et al. (2010) highlight the five scaffolding intentions suggested by Tharp and Gallimore (1988): direction maintenance, structuring, freedom rate reduction, managing and controlling frustration, and a final intention labeled as "the six means" (Van de Pol et al., 2010, p. 276). The latter consists of feedback, hints, instruction, explanation, modeling, and questioning. Essentially, intention refers to what teachers scaffold, and 'the means' refers to how they conduct scaffolding. Van de Pol et al. (2010) assert, "Any combination of scaffolding means with scaffolding intention can be construed as a scaffolding strategy" (p. 277).

Scaffolding Strategies and Techniques
Writing skills have long been a sign of a learner's ability to demonstrate grammatical and lexical fluency and accuracy (Choi & Wong, 2018). Numerous studies indicate that scaffolding is effective in L2 English writing classrooms for all ages and proficiency levels. The following are research-based strategies for implementing effective instructional scaffolding in the classroom.

Modeling as a Scaffolding Tool
Salisu and Ransom (2014) define modeling as "an instructional strategy in which the teacher demonstrates a new concept or approach to learning and students learn by observing" (p. 54). Modeling allows teachers to impart knowledge to students when they perform or model tasks that students observe. Developing cognitive and metacognitive competencies and skills requires opportunities for more practice until the learners achieve a higher level of competence and mastery in particular areas. In this fashion, Salisu and Ransom (2014) argue that skill mastery occurs when models provide "guidance, feedback, and social reinforcement during practice" (p. 55). Benko (2012) asserts, "Modeling is a concept often recommended in writing instruction,

but it is worth considering how demonstration, or the use of models, might best support student writers" (p. 296).

Content, Linguistic, and Structural Scaffolds

Choi and Wong (2018) distinguish three types of scaffolding in writing: content scaffolding, structural scaffolding, and linguistic scaffolding. Examples of content scaffolds include modeling class activities, discussing reading texts, and explicitly teaching content. In addition, integrating reading and writing can encourage students to read for ideas and write appropriately, especially if they are unfamiliar with the topic. Choi and Wong (2018) contend that by integrating reading and writing, teachers "activate their students' content schemata to comprehend a text [and this] integration guides them to read for information and serves as comprehensible input for a subsequent writing task" (p. 3).

Teachers can achieve structural scaffolding through explicitly teaching a text's organizational features and using sentence patterns or frames to scaffold students' basic writing skills. Linguistic scaffolding includes direct instruction of grammar features and relevant vocabulary. Linguistic scaffolding in supporting students' writing development requires input for different genres and purposes of writing and explicit discussion of grammatical features (Choi and Wong, 2018). Lexical knowledge helps students write coherently and cohesively and makes grammar features easier to discuss with students. In addition, it teaches them to connect grammar with different writing genres by using the simple past in the narrative writing genre, for example.

Scaffolding through Writing Exemplars

Students can borrow the linguistic and structural features and grammatical constructions from a writing model to construct their writing. This strategy boosts confidence in their writing ability and helps them build ideas and learn to write independently (Walqui, 2006).

Scaffolding through Dialogic Instruction

Dialogic feedback is the interactive exchange of negotiated meanings, interactive ideas, thoughts, and sharing of views and interpretations (Carless, 2013). Students learn to think only when they engage directly in a live dialogue with a teacher or a peer or by listening to people dialoguing. By engaging in dialogic inquiry, students learn to ask open questions and learn new things for themselves. Dialogic feedback clarifies misconceptions, boosts students' confidence, builds trust, and allows students to express their ideas freely (Carless, 2013).

Scaffolding in the Classroom
Classroom Interactions

To assist students in their writing, the present researcher experimented with several pedagogical and research-based strategies in the classroom. Following are examples of strategies the instructor utilized to enhance students' learning and assist them in their ZPDs.

Building content knowledge using reading texts, writing exemplars, advance organizers, and pre-writing activities (Carless, 2013; Choi & Wong, 2018; Vasquez & Coudin, 2018).
- Explicit teaching of vocabulary (Dakun, 2000) using synonyms, collocations (Farrokh, 2012), word derivatives, and cloze exercises (Raymond, 1988).

- Modeling, questioning, back feeding, explaining, and explicit teaching to build content knowledge and explore language and text structure (Benko, 2012; Van de Pol et al., 2010; Walqui, 2006).
- Teaching with rubrics to communicate the goals of each writing task (Andrade, 2000; Benko, 2012).
- Bridging, modeling, explaining, and instructing to emphasize essential vocabulary and grammar features (Van de Pol, 2010).
- Cloze exercises trigger thinking, consolidate vocabulary and enhance sentence structure (Raymond, 1988).
- Teaching collocations enhances students' native-like competence (Farrokh, 2012).
- Encouraging students to use several grammatical constructions from the writing model and re-contextualize it to construct their writing. Model essays serve as comprehensible input for writing (Benko, 2012; Choi & Wong, 2018), boost students' confidence, and reduce the fear of writing in a second language (Van lier, 2004; Walqui, 2006).

Focusing on Understanding

The following is an edited transcript of a teacher-student interaction during a feedback session. By helping the student fix her sentences, the instructor focuses on understanding and builds her students' competence.

Instructor: Look at this sentence! What is missing here? Read it for me, please.

Student: In this essay, I will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of work and live in other countries.

Instructor: What's wrong with this sentence?

Student: of? For?

Instructor: is it of live or of living?

Student: of living.

Instructor: Correct. After preps, always use either a noun or a verb ending in 'ing.' So of living.

Student: living and working.

Instructor. Yes. Living and working. Ok?

Student: ok.

Instructor: Now, let's look at this one (another sentence). 'Living and working abroad it is ….' What's wrong here?

Student: it is.

Instructor: yes, why is it wrong?

Student: without it.

Instructor: Good. You already have a subject. So, you don't need to use a second one.

Student: yes, miss.

Instructor: Let's move on to the next one. (The instructor reads the sentence aloud) For example, some people abroad in other countries to find a job'. Where's the verb of this sentence? Some people abroad? Abroad is not a verb? Abroad means outside the country.

Student: go?

Instructor: Yes, correct. Go or travel … you can use travel. Ok? Clear? The rest is fine.

Expanding Student Vocabulary

The following is an interaction sample in a writing class. Students were writing their first draft. One student asks for a word that collocates with 'knowledge.'

> Student: Miss, which word I can use with knowledge. I don't want 'get.' I want another word.
>
> Instructor: Ok. You can use the word …you can use one of these: 'broaden, widen, or enhance' (The instructor wrote the new terms on the whiteboard). There are many depending on what you want to say.
>
> Student: traveling widen your knowledge and your experience.
>
> Instructor: widens! Add an s. You can use 'enrich' or enhance your experience.
>
> Student: okay, miss.
>
> Instructor: for the word skills, you can use enhance, improve, or upgrade (the instructor wrote the new terms on the whiteboard).
>
> Student: ok.

Measuring Effective Scaffolding in the Classroom

Van de Pol et al. (2010) describe scaffolding as a dynamic intervention. It references the context or situation, the nature of the task provided, and students' responses. They argue that the main challenge for scaffolding is finding reliable and valid instruments to measure its effectiveness. Effectiveness means evidence that "the mentor's support was tuned in to the learner's present state of understanding, that the learner accomplished the task with the mentor's situated help, and that the learner performed the task independently" (Van de Pol et al., 2010, p. 286). Van de Pol et al. suggest three phases of effective scaffolding: contingency, fading, and transfer of responsibility. Contingency occurs when the learner completes the task independently, makes some progress, or is ready to proceed to the next task. Fading means the instructor can vanish, and the learner needs less support. Thus, the teacher can gradually remove their support and transfer the onus of learning to the learner.

Summary

Effective scaffolded writing emphasizes and covers the different components of writing, namely its cognitive, metacognitive, and affective. In addition, independent and collaborative work, modeling, explicit teaching, follow-up discussions, and peer and teacher feedback are part and parcel of the instructional scaffolding process. Numerous research studies on scaffolding in L2 learning indicate that student writing skills and sub-skills improve significantly after incorporating instructional scaffolding into the writing activities (Melrose et al., 2013; Piamsai, 2020; Walqui, 2006). However, Van de Pol et al. (2010) argue that scaffolding cannot be applied in all situations in the same way; it is not a one-size-fits-all technique. It depends on the quality of tasks designed and how students respond. Therefore, teachers should tailor the scaffolds to students' levels of competence and should remove scaffolding progressively as students' learning increases. Altogether, scaffolding frameworks emphasize three central aspects of writing: cognitive, metacognitive, and affective.

The Researcher as an Active Participant in the Present Research

The present researcher is an instructor of the Intensive English Program (IEP 101). She is both an observer and a participant in this classroom research. The study is observational, descriptive,

and interpretive. The instructor emphasized key pedagogical teaching concepts and research-based strategies to scaffold students' writing skills. In selecting and tailoring classroom tasks and stimulating instructor-student classroom interactions and discussions, the researcher highlighted the following key ideas: scaffolding contingency, fading, transfer of responsibility, and scaffolding means and intentions (Van de Pol et al., 2010). In addition, she examined the impact of affective scaffolding.

Research Questions
1. What writing challenges did the participants experience?
2. What effect does instructional scaffolding have on students' writing performance from the participants' perspectives?

Methodology
This section provides information on the instructional context and participants, introduces the research instruments, discusses the research procedure, and explains how data is analyzed.

Context of the Study and Participants
The researcher conducted the present study during the spring semester (February-May) of 2022 at the City University College of Ajman, UAE. The study participants were nine foundation-level students enrolled in the IEP 101 class. The participants are five Emirati students; three males and two females, and four male Arab expatriates. The primary goal of the IEP 101 course is to scaffold the students' primary language skills of reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary and to prepare them for the Emirates Standardized Test (EmSAT). To teach this course, the instructor designed EmSAT-informed weekly learning plans for IEP 101 morning classes to prepare them for the EmSAT. The present research focuses on the writing component of the EmSAT. The EmSAT writing is computer-based and comprises only one writing task delivered in English. Test participants must write between 200 and 250 words of opinion essays, problem-solution essays, or advantages and disadvantages. The writing component accounts for 25% of the total EmSAT exam score, and 75% of the final score is allocated to the reading and language components of the test (see https://emsat.gov.ae/emsat/doc/Achieve).

Research Design and Instruments
To validate the research results, the researcher resorted to a mixed-methods approach and collected a blend of qualitative and quantitative data. Three data collection instruments were used: a pre-and-post-writing test, a student attitude questionnaire, and a focus-group interview.

Pre-and-post-writing Tests
The researcher designed the pre-and-posttests with two goals in mind. The first is to diagnose areas of strengths and weaknesses and the second is to monitor students' progress. Two instructors double-rated and marked both tests using a writing assessment rubric. The test results helped answer the central question of the present study about the writing challenges participants experienced

Student Attitude Questionnaire

The researcher created an attitude questionnaire to gain insight into students' perceptions, experiences, and feelings about scaffolded writing. The questionnaire comprised three parts: The first part examined students' writing difficulties through check-all-that-apply answers for one open question. The second part contained 18 items exploring students' cognitive, metacognitive, and affective development.

Focus-group interview

The researcher designed a focus-group interview involving six volunteers to triangulate the data and achieve inter-rater reliability. The interview comprised six open-ended questions intended to examine students' thoughts about their writing at the beginning of the course and after its completion. The interviewer added probing questions as necessary. The focus-group interview is dynamic and interactive. Rabiee (2004) highlights group dynamics as a distinct feature of focus-group interviews, noting that the data generated from group interaction is deeper and richer than data obtained from individual one-to-one interviews.

Data Analysis and Findings

The researcher conducted the data collection and analysis concurrently in an iterative procedure. First, the researcher analyzed the questionnaire results. Then she formulated the focus-group interview questions based on the survey findings. The pre-posttests were analyzed and coded (e.g., FS1= Female Student 1; FS2=Female Student2, MS1=Male Student1, MS2=Male Student 2, etc.)

Responses to Question 1: What writing challenges did the participants experience?

Based on the literature review, the researcher listed ten possible challenges for students' problems with writing in general, shortage of ideas, lack of organization, limited writing vocabulary, incorrect grammar and spelling, using Arabic as a matrix language, lack of fluency, and low levels of self-confidence in writing. The surveyed students were asked to check all the answers that applied to the first part of the questionnaire. All participants selected more than one option (see Table 1). All surveyed students reported having problems with writing. They attributed their poor writing skills to limited knowledge of essay organization, a weak vocabulary bank, and serious grammar and spelling mistakes. Seven of the nine surveyed students did not know how to start a paragraph and could not generate ideas for writing. Six out of nine students said they could not write more than 50-60 words, and five out of nine admitted they lacked confidence in their writing ability. Only two students reported thinking in Arabic and translating their thoughts into English when writing.

Table 1.*Writing Difficulties among All Surveyed Participants*
(n=9)

Writing Challenges	N* of Students
Writing problems in general	100% (=9)
Lack of organization	88.9% (=8)
Lack of sufficient vocabulary	100% (=9)
Lack of content/ideas	77.8% (=7)
Lack of writing fluency	77.8% (=7)
Grammar mistakes	100% (=9)
Spelling mistakes	100% (=9)
Does not know how to start	88.9% (=8)
Thinking in L1 when writing in L2	22.3% (=2)

Lack of confidence	55.6% (=5)

These responses suggest that all participants find L2 writing burdensome. Shortage of writing content and poor linguistic and structural skills are evident. These deficits constitute a hindrance to some students who lack confidence in writing or think in L1 when writing in L2. Finally, slow typing speed is an issue that needs tackling.

The interviewed students' responses to this question confirmed the questionnaire responses to this question. However, one interview participant admitted using *Google Translate* to translate sentences from Arabic into English, and this issue calls for further research. When asked to specify other difficulties, two participants raised the following points:

"FS1: "*I am not fast. I need more time to write. I don't finish writing in time*".
MS2 "*I am not fast on computer, I spend too much time writing and always I have problems with keyboard.*"

Responses to Research Question 2: **What is the effect of instructional scaffolding on students' essay writing from the participants' perspectives?**
The literature indicates that measuring the effectiveness of instructional scaffolding is challenging and stresses the value of designing reliable and valid measurement instruments. According to Van de Pol et al. (2010), a teacher's support is effective only if the learner completes the task independently, demonstrates some progress, or moves to the next step in their learning. On this premise, the researcher utilized three methods to measure the effectiveness of scaffolding. First, two colleagues teaching the same course were invited to grade the pre and post-writing tests using a writing rubric. Second, the researcher elicited students' attitudes and experiences about scaffolding in class through an attitude questionnaire and a focus-group interview.

The following is a record of the pre-and-post-test scores. The instructors marked them using a writing rubric emphasizing four areas: task completion, organization, linguistic variety, and structural variety and accuracy. The rubrics were assigned the following weights: writing: 15 points; task completion: 4 points; organization: 3 points; lexical variety: 4 points; structural variety and accuracy: 4 points. Letter 'S' refers to 'Student.' The instructor administered the pre-test in the second week of February and the post-test in the third week of May.

Table 2. *Pre-and-Protest Scores*

	1- Pre-test Scores																	
	Marker1									**Marker 2**								
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9
Task completion (4 marks)	1	2	3	4	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	1	1
Organization (3 marks)	2	2	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	1	1	1
Lexical variety (4 marks)	1	1	3	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	3	2	2	1	2	1	2
Structural variety & Accuracy (4 marks)	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Total score (/15)	5	6	11	10	8	6	5	4	5	6	6	10	9	7	6	6	4	5

2- Post-test Scores

	Marker1									Marker 2								
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9
Task completion (4 marks)	2	3	4	4	4	3	2	2	2	2	3	4	4	3	3	3	2	3
Organization (3 marks)	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	2	3	2	3	4	3	3	3	3	2	3
Lexical variety (4 marks)	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	2
Structural variety & Accuracy (4 marks)	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1
Total score (/15)	8	9	13	13	11	10	9	7	10	7	9	13	12	10	10	10	7	9

Table 3. *Comparing Pre-and Posttest Scores Paired Samples Statistics*

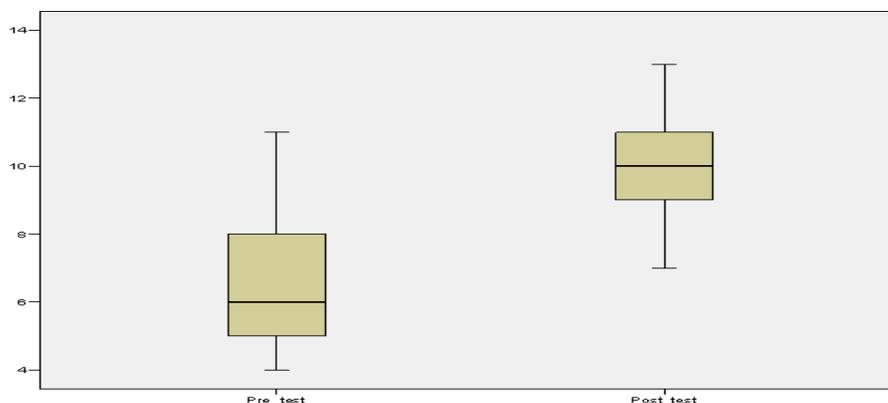|	Mean	N	S.D.	T-test	P-value
Pre-Test Scores	6.6111	18	2.11824	-15.567	0.000
Post-test Scores	9.8333	18	1.97782		

Figure 1. Visualizing the difference between pre-test and post-test achievement scores

A paired sample t-test was conducted to test if there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. The results showed a significant difference between the two tests (T=

(17)-15.567, P-value = 0.000). Figure 1 above indicates that median post-test scores are higher than median pre-test scores and that both variables appear to be normally distributed.

Tables 2 and 3 indicate that students' performance in the post-test (mean=9.83%) outweighed their performance in the pre-test (mean=6.61%). If anything, these scores confirm the positive effect of instructional scaffolding on students' writing to varying degrees depending on their competence levels.

The researcher randomly selected three pre-and-post-tests to gain more insight into students' performance in both tests. The papers selected were those of S3, S4, and S8. (See Tables 2 and 3).

S3 Performance in Pre-and-Post-tests
Marker 1 Comments
"In the pre-test, the student understood the topic, and he organized his essay well using transitional signals and sequencing. One problematic issue stood out: many fragments and run-ons. In addition, there are a couple of grammar mistakes. Some keywords are used but repetitively. I noticed that the student was more fluent in his post-writing test writing than in the pre-test. He used good words to express his ideas, such as technology, transportation, freedom, and communication. He still needs to proofread his paper. There is progress."

Marker 2 Comments
"In the pre-test, the student fulfills the task and understands what is required. However, he has grammar and spelling issues. In addition, his ideas are not well-developed and, in many instances, confusing, probably due to wrong word choices. He used only essential lexical items, but he used them repetitively. In addition, he has limited control of word choice. The post-test is well structured, and the student correctly used the transition words/phrases. The student used good vocabulary but needs to mind his grammar and spelling. Nevertheless, overall, there is some improvement."

S4 Performance in Pre-and-posttests
Marker 1 Comments
"The intro is well-organized, and the thesis is clear, but the sub-topics are not grammatically parallel. The student's vocabulary range is minimal. He repeated the phrase 'it is important twice. The last part is confusing. The post-test is clearer. The student developed his ideas in the body paragraphs but still needs work on grammar and spelling. There is a slight improvement."

Marker 2 Comments
"The student understood the topic well and attempted to develop his ideas to support his claim. However, due to the limited range of lexical items, he repeated the exact words in the intro and the first paragraph. He failed to express his ideas clearly in many instances (e.g., gain new skills and avoid knowledge). In addition, he was unable to write error-free simple sentences. There are many misspelled words. In the post-test, the intro is complete, and the main idea is clearly stated. The student used specific details to back up his claim. He used good words, and the sentences were correct but lacked variety. The student used the same sentence pattern (when… they can)."

S8 Performance in Pre-and-posttests
Marker 1 Comments
"The student attempted to focus on the topic. However, there are many unnecessary sentences. His writing lacks good organization, and his vocabulary is minimal. Poor word choice and incorrect spelling interfere with meaning. He used essential words repetitively and some other words improperly (e.g., avoid knowledge). However, in the post-test, the essay is more structured; there are some good words and a few grammar mistakes. Probably they need to review if-clauses."

Marker 2 Comments
"The student fulfilled the task in the pre-test. However, he did not expand his ideas. There is a lack of organization, and he used a limited range of lexical items. In addition, some misspelled words might interfere with the meaning. In the post-test, the student's essay was well-organized, and he expanded his ideas more in each paragraph; he used good words and some collocations (e.g., widening knowledge) relevant to the topic in question. He was wrestling with words in the pre-test but generally felt that he wrote more comfortably and confidently, making fewer grammar mistakes in the post-test. Therefore, he made progress."

Overall, markers reported improvement in the students' essay organization, richer content, a more sophisticated vocabulary repertory, and higher levels of fluency and accuracy. However, students still need to improve their spelling.

Surveyed Students' Responses to Question 2
Surveyed students' responses (see Appendix A, Table 4) to the check-all-that-apply questions suggest that the scaffolded writing classes have helped the participants develop their cognitive knowledge. They reported gaining new words, structures, and information. They also said applying the newly acquired knowledge and skills to their writing to varying degrees. Students' responses ranged in checking 'I use the new knowledge when writing' and evaluating 'the self, peer, and teacher feedback.' All students valued the teacher's constructive feedback. Based on
the surveyed students' responses, students' cognitive, metacognitive, and affective scaffolding abilities improved to varying degrees. Students have benefited from the scaffolded writing strategies, such as modeling, class discussions, and reading for information. However, they need to control their writing and depend less on their teachers as they learn.

Focus Group Interview Responses
The focus group participants' responses support their survey responses. The following extracts (Table 5) from the interviewed participants summarize students' overall experiences with scaffolded writing strategies and the writing challenges they encountered before joining the IEP writing class. This class is at a lower intermediate level; again, the researcher presented the quotes as they are, without editing, and classified students' responses into cognitive, metacognitive, and affective development. She coded the sections: "FS=female student and MS= male student."

Table 5 .*Focus Group Interview Responses*

Cognitive development	Metacognitive development	Affective development
FS1: "I learn many words with my teacher." **FS2**: "I learn to organize my essay and many things" **MS1**: "I learn more words vocab." **MS2**: "my writing is good now, better than before and grammar also.. I mean still some mistakes but not like before." **MS3**: "I learn new words but spelling, I want to learn how to make less mistakes in spelling.. like a technique." **MS4:** "I learn words and I get ideas from discussing the writing from the beginning to the end." **MS5**: "I used to write the word, not like 100% right. Now I'm okay. Little bit problems with grammar."	**FS1: "**You told us about the technique and about how we can write and now I can write a paragraph alone." **FS2**: "I can organize the paragraph and write for the separate parts." **MS2**: "I can now organize my ideas not like before." **MS3**: "With my teacher help, I can write essays alone. I feel more confident." **MS4**: Yes, I use all the good words in my essay and I check my grammar of course. The spelling is my problem, teacher. I hope the EmSAT exam is like this." **MS5**: "but sometimes also, you give us new ideas, new techniques to write and we use it in the essay. We write the ideas in the essay."	**FS1**: "Now I am more confident when I write." **FS2**: "Yes more confident." **MS3**: "I feel more confident." **MS4**: "Yes more confident ..before I don't know how to write a paragraph before.. and after we discuss it, I'm better because we discuss our mistakes." **MS5**: "yes, not afraid like before, but teacher, we still need your help when we write, not all the time like in the beginning."

The conclusion to draw from students' opinions and attitudes is that they all benefited from scaffolding in writing classes to various degrees. Students generally learned how to organize their body paragraphs, use new words in their essays, and write confidently. Although there is some progress in using correct grammar and spelling, the improvement is slight, and thus grammar and spelling constitute outstanding issues that need to be addressed.

Conclusion

The present study sought to examine students' writing challenges and explore the effect of the scaffolded approach on their writing skills and abilities. The findings revealed that students faced problems in essay writing, such as lack of organization, paucity of ideas, and issues with grammar and spelling. The pre-posttest results indicated that students' writing skills have improved, that they have learned to organize their essays, and that they are better able to use new words appropriately. They also learned to support their opinions with examples. In addition, they have gained more confidence in writing than before. Interviewed students emphasized the importance of teachers' encouragement and constructive feedback to improve their writing. Accordingly, the researcher recommends scaffolding students' writing during the pre-writing, writing, and post-writing sessions to raise their awareness of grammatical and lexical mistakes, increase their learning and reflection, and boost their confidence.

Overall, the present case study reports on nine students only. The findings it has reached are provisional. It will be interesting to see if a survey with a much higher number of students corroborates these findings. Finally, gauging the effect of scaffolding on students' oral

communication is a project well worth pursuing from a cognitive, metacognitive, and affective perspective.

About the Author

Faiza Mohamed Tabib is a 3rd year Ph.D. student. She obtained her MATESOL degree in 2011 from the American University of Sharjah, UAE. She presented numerous Educational papers from 2014- 2020. She currently works as an English instructor at the City University College of Ajman (CUCA), UAE. Her research agenda focuses on second language acquisition, academic writing, and online learning research. ORCiD; **https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2863-0886**

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Appendix A
Table 3- *Surveyed Students' Responses*

Skills Gained	N*of Students
A-Cognitive	
1. I learned new and useful vocabulary words/phrases	9
2. I gained new ideas from for writing	9
3. I learned proper structures and language expressions	6
4. I used the vocabulary I learned when writing essays	7
5. I used the structures I learned when writing essays	7
6. I used the new ideas I gained in class when writing essays	8
B- Metacognitive	
7. I always plan before I start writing	3
8. I make sure I use appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar	7
9. I make sure I generate relevant ideas	8
10. After I finish writing, I evaluate my work	3
11. My peers' comments are useful	5
12. My instructor's feedback is useful	9

C- Affective	
13. Now, I feel less worried when I write an essay	6
14. I feel more confident when I write an essay	7
15. I am more motivated to write an essay	7
16. I can write on my own without my teacher's help	6
17. I gained more control over my writing	6
18. In the future, I will continue practicing writing essays	8