Instructional Scaffolding Strategies to Support the L2 Writing of EFL College Students in Kuwait

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Abstract

This classroom-based study investigated the most frequently employed instructional scaffolding strategies to support second language (L2) writing by three English as foreign language (EFL) college teachers in Kuwait. Thus, this study had two aims: (1) to investigate the most frequently-used scaffolding strategies for teaching writing that were employed by the participating EFL teachers, and (2) to survey the students' perceptions of their teachers' scaffolding strategies. Data collection methods included classroom observations, a survey, and six group interviews with the three teachers. Microsoft Excel software was used to analyze the numerical data from the survey. The observations and interviews produced the most frequently used strategies for instructional scaffolding in the EFL writing classroom. The grounded survey items were gleaned from the data of the observations and group interviews. The survey was distributed among the students to gain their perceptions of their teachers' instructional scaffolding strategies. The findings revealed that the three EFL teachers frequently employed the two scaffolding strategies of rhetorical scaffolding and prior knowledge scaffolding. However, they utilized contextual scaffolding and language development scaffolding to a lesser extent in the writing classroom. Implications included the need to orient EFL teachers through training courses on scaffolding strategies and their optimal applications in the writing classroom.

Keywords: instructional scaffolding strategies, L2 writing instruction, students' perceptions, L2 rhetorical conventions, graphic organizers

1. Introduction

Instructional scaffolding has been shown to be effective in supporting English as second language (ESL) learners in writing and reading academic English (e.g., Mahan, 2022; Mežek, McGrath, Negretti, & Berggren, 2022). Moreover, research studies were conducted on EFL students and found that instructional scaffolding made a positive contribution to EFL students' achievement in English writing (e.g., Obeiah & Bataineh, 2015). Furthermore, studies on scaffolding in Arabic EFL settings (e.g., Elachachi, 2015) have investigated the potential impact of the students' literacy in the native language L1 (Arabic) and their knowledge of the L1 rhetorical conventions on their attempts to write in the (L2) English. However, some researchers (e.g., Awadelkarim, 2021; Salem, 2017) reported a lack of clarity among EFL researchers and teachers in understanding scaffolding and its theoretical underpinnings as well as its classroom applications.

As the educational field moves gradually from a "teacher-centered" to a "learner-centered" classroom, educational researchers are looking for classroom methodologies and approaches that help create a learner-supportive environment in the classroom. Mahan (2022) reported, however, that different interpretations and varied conceptualizations still exist for instructional scaffolding. Researchers and teachers have not yet managed to reach a unified understanding of scaffolding as a component of a learner-supportive environment in the classroom.   The present study is significant because it has set out to identify the main scaffolding strategies, and to specify which ones are the most frequently-employed by EFL teachers. The goal of the present study was to add to the knowledge-base a description of scaffolding strategies to help EFL students learn English writing. Therefore, the present study sought answers for the following research questions:

(1) What was the frequency with which the three EFL teachers employed instructional scaffolding   strategies?

(2) What were the EFL students' perceptions of their teachers' instructional scaffolding   strategies?

2. Review of the Literature

The present study investigated scaffolding to support the L2 writing of Arabic-speaking learners. The purpose of this review was to explore published studies that have targeted scaffolding strategies that were employed for teaching L2 writing. This review was divided into three sections. The first section reviewed studies of scaffolding in English education that contributed to building a construct of scaffolding strategies to support L2 writing. The second section included a construct that was built out of the four main scaffolding strategies that were reviewed in the first section as scaffolding strategies in the EFL writing classroom. The third section of the review focused on the role of students' perceptions in scaffolding studies.

2.1 Scaffolding in English Language Education

Scaffolding in the educational sense was first defined by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) as the "interactional instructional relationship between adults and learners that enables a child or novice to solve a problem beyond his unassisted efforts" (p. 90). Educators have, consequently, adopted Bruner's definition of scaffolding to describe the interactions between teachers and their students in their attempts to assist students to complete tasks in the classroom. Scaffolding was thus viewed as a pedagogical tool to be employed by teachers working at every juncture in the lesson to give their students a level of assistance without which they could not complete classroom tasks and reap the full benefits of classroom learning. Educational researchers, who were also influenced by the sociocultural theory promoted by Vygotsky, adopted the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) as a metaphor to denote the distance between what a child or student knows and what she/he needs to know to reach what a teacher or an adult caretaker can do. Moreover, Maybin, Mercer, and Stierer (1992) introduced scaffolding as "a type of teacher assistance that helps students learn new skills, concepts, or levels of understanding that lead to the student successfully completing a task." (p. 188). Furthermore, Mahan (2022) suggested that "scaffolding strategies operate from a "macro" level (e.g., curriculum planning that integrates language systematically) to a "micro" level (e.g., interactional scaffolding)" (p. 2).

However, research studies have revealed that there was a common lack of knowledge among EFL teachers of scaffolding as a method and how to best apply scaffolding techniques in the L2 writing classroom. For example, Salem (2017) has concluded that EFL teachers in Egypt were not aware of the nature of scaffolding strategies to support reading comprehension. Salem (2017) observed that teachers did not distinguish between using scaffolding strategies to assess reading comprehension and using these same strategies to assist student reading comprehension. Furthermore, Awadelkarim (2021) conducted a study of teachers' perceptions of and attitudes toward scaffolding at a Saudi university. Data analysis revealed that the group of 30 participating teachers who were randomly selected, in fact, lacked adequate knowledge of the principles and approaches underlying scaffolding. Moreover, the participating teachers were less confident of their theoretical beliefs in applying practical and pedagogical scaffolding in the EFL classroom.

Due to the fact that there were several conceptualizations of scaffolding by multiple researchers, and in order to dispel researchers' common lack of clarity in investigating scaffolding, Mahan (2022) proposed a comprehensive framework for the study of scaffolding in content and language integrated learning (CLIL). Mahan's study was a notable contribution to a unified understanding of scaffolding in the CLIL classroom. Her study set out to explore the scaffolding strategies CLIL teachers used to help their L2 English students comprehend material and complete tasks. Mahan was not only interested in specifying the main scaffolding strategies, but also in the frequency with which some scaffolding strategies were used more than others. In a similar fashion, the present study investigated the most frequently used scaffolding strategies in the EFL classroom.

2.2 A Construct of Scaffolding Strategies to Support L2 Writing

In order to identify the most-frequently used scaffolding strategies, the present study reviewed a number of studies that have directly targeted scaffolding in the EFL/ESL classroom. The aim of this section was thus to emerge with a construct of the main instructional scaffolding strategies employed by EFL teachers in the English classroom. Based on the review of literature, a comprehensive construct emerged for identifying and describing scaffolding in teaching L2 writing to EFL students. The construct consisted of four main instructional scaffolding strategies as follows.

- Rhetorical scaffolding is utilized for supporting the students' knowledge of the rhetorical conventions of English writing,

- Prior knowledge scaffolding is employed to refresh students' memories to build new foundations for new knowledge construction,

- Contextual scaffolding is utilized for providing teaching aids such as charts, maps, and graphic organizers to make abstract ideas concrete and easier to understand, and

- Language development scaffolding is employed to support the development of students' vocabulary repertoires and their grammatical accuracy.

2.2.1 Rhetorical Scaffolding

The first strategy was termed rhetorical scaffolding which was specific to teaching the literacy skills of reading and writing to EFL students. English teachers scaffold rhetorical information through presenting the writing conventions and rhetorical features of distinct types of essays and paragraphs (e.g., descriptive, persuasive, compare and contrast, problem and solution, etc.). One of the concerns with teaching English writing is that college level EFL students already have literacy in their native language. In other words, EFL students' literacy skills in L1 may influence their attempts to write in the L2. For example, Elachachi (2015) found that the role of the students' first language and culture in shaping the rhetorical conventions in the writing of a certain L1 may hinder the learning and use of the L2 rhetorical conventions. 16 Algerian students aged 18 to 20 were each requested to write a narrative essay and a descriptive essay of 150 words. The essays were subjected to contrastive rhetoric analysis which revealed obvious signs of L1 (Arabic) influence that could be cultural and/or rhetorical in nature. Implications for teachers included that they need to make students aware of the cultural information that guided the formation of L2 rhetorical conventions. Research studies into the intercultural aspects of rhetoric as an aspect of L2 writing have, generally, looked into the cultural influences on L2 texts by comparing texts of two or more languages (e.g., Scollon & Scollon, 2005). For example, employing Swales' (1990) concept of moves and steps, Jwa (2020) compared the rhetorical organization of Korean and English texts produced by ten Korean EFL students. The students were each asked to write two essays, following the argumentative genre, one in Korean and one in English, in response to two different topics. The researcher found that the students wrote almost similar essays containing each an introduction, body, and conclusion. But upon closer analysis at the micro-level of discourse, the students were found to have written better essays in Korean than in English because they employed a variety of steps to create a move. The students were also found to have written with slight variation of steps in the English texts. Jwa (2020) suggested that the absence of moves and steps in the Korean students' English texts may be due to a lack of practice with rhetorical "thinking" in English. Moreover, Bhowmik and Chaudhuri (2022) proposed six teaching strategies for addressing culture in the L2 writing of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students. The strategies have been promoted to enhance student awareness about different cultural and linguistic resources in L2 writing as a way to help them overcome cultural challenges and make them critically aware of the linguistic and cultural resources they possess in L2 writing.

2.2.2 Prior Knowledge Scaffolding

The second scaffolding strategy was adopted from Walqui (2006) who observed that English teachers scaffold to help English language learners by capitalizing on learners' previous knowledge to introduce new information. Walqui remarked that teachers employed scaffolding to assist their students in understanding new material by "drawing on pre-existing knowledge." Examples of this strategy include ascertaining what the students already know and building on that foundation to introduce new knowledge, using examples from current affairs and world events, and using knowledge that has been already introduced in previous lessons. Bunch, Walqui, and Pearson (2014) further remarked that L2 readers need to draw on existing "background knowledge" to construct text meaning. Additionally, Gallagher and Colohan (2017) suggested that previous knowledge can include the knowledge and skills already acquired from the learner's first language (L1). As a matter of fact, several researchers (e.g., Cook, 2001) have argued that the teacher's use of the L1 can be a powerful scaffolding strategy in EFL classrooms where the teacher and students share a common first language and cultural background. This strategy can include teachers' using L1 to help students comprehend new material faster especially in explaining new L2 vocabulary and grammar rules.

2.2.3 Contextual Scaffolding

The third strategy, contextual scaffolding, also suggested by Walqui (2006), was teachers' use of supportive materials such as graphic organizers, maps, charts, and visual displays. Walqui (2006) suggested that second language learners need to "construct their understanding on the basis of multiple clues and perspectives" (p. 169) and, hence, require rich extra-linguistic contexts and supportive materials. Graphic organizers are one type of contextual scaffolding strategies that was scrutinized by researchers to explore their effectiveness in enhancing listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. For example, Karimi, Ghorbanchian, Chalak, and Tabrizi (2020) assigned a total of 157 EFL students to an experimental group and a control group who received a pretest, treatment, and a post-test. Students in the experimental group were provided with four graphic organizers during

the treatment while the control group did not receive any graphic organizers. The researchers found that the experimental group outperformed the control group in both listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. The study suggested that the use of computerized graphic organizers reduced the cognitive load on the students and focused their attention on new vocabulary items (p. 50). Moreover, Mora-González, Anderson, and Cuesta-Medina (2018) demonstrated that graphic organizers are visual displays that depict information for young L2 writers in various ways and can provide an organizational structure which promotes their autonomy. Furthermore, Jeon, Kwon, and Bae (2022) compared the effects of three graphic organizers including T-charts, tree-charts, and maps in online discussions. A tree-chart contains a subject to branch out into a tree of subtopics, a map represents the relations of a topic with links and nodes, and a T-chart is a table that represents the two sides of a subject (e.g., benefits vs. drawbacks). The study investigated the effects of the three graphic organizers on the students' involvements in an online collaborative environment. A total of 36 graduate students were assigned in discussions with one type of graphic organizer for each of the three groups. The results indicated that T-charts led to more alternative ideas for discussion than the other two graphic organizers. This study suggested that choosing a specific form of graphic organizer can affect the ways in which learners construct knowledge in collective work. In sum, EFL teachers can assist students to understand how to write texts through the use of graphic organizers and other displays for organizing information to concretize abstract ideas through visual aids.

2.2.4 Language Development Scaffolding

The fourth strategy was termed language development scaffolding. This strategy was employed, so students can use correct language in the classroom. In classroom interactions, English teachers often scaffold syntactic and lexical information with their students. For example, Morton (2015) employed a conversation analysis approach to illustrate how CLIL teachers employed scaffolding during the teaching of vocabulary to support academic language development. Moreover, Gibbons (2015) suggested that academic language development in the classroom included asking students to describe new terminology by encouraging students to use their own words. The teacher then had the option of rephrasing students' output in an idiomatic way. Finally, in a large-scale study in California, U.S.A., the effects of digital scaffolding were examined on the English literacy of 1,085 fourth and sixth grade students (Park, Xu, Collins, Farkas, & Warschauer, 2019). Students from three school districts who participated in the study for one school year were divided into 25 treatment classes and 20 control classes. The treatment groups were given their English language arts and social studies text in visual-syntactic text format (VSTF) on their laptops, and the control students read the regular textbooks either on their laptops or in print. The researchers determined that VSTF reading increased student learning in reading activities. Specifically, VSTF benefited the treatment students in three categories: word analysis, written conventions, and writing strategies.

2.3 Students' Perceptions

The second research question targeted students' perceptions of their teachers' scaffolding strategies. Van Lier (2014) was methodologically interested in understanding scaffolding from the perspectives of participating teachers and students. This methodological interest in student perceptions was carried over in the present study because learners are the main recipients of the teachers' scaffolding strategies. Van Lier (2014) adopted a classroom-oriented view to scaffolding in which he was concerned with the "minute-to-minute support teachers give their students in the classroom" (p. 148). Therefore, second language researchers set out to explore the students' perceptions of their teachers' scaffolding strategies. For example, Mežek et al. (2022) conducted a study in which students read five texts and posted blog posts in response to task prompts from their teachers. This design feature was used to measure the effects of teacher feedback on the students' self-regulation in a reading course. The authors found that providing students with a blog post to explore their perceptions of learning how to read was crucial for gaining access to examine students' reading strategies. Thus, gaining insights from this data source allowed the researchers to examine a variety of students' reading strategies and the ways in which they were employed by the students in their self-regulation as readers. Furthermore, Hasan and Rezaul Karim (2019) examined the effects of scaffolding on the development of higher-order thinking skills as evidenced in the academic writing of undergraduate students. The researchers were also interested in measuring the effects of motivation and positive teacher perceptions on students' writing in English.

Thus, there was a need in the present study to achieve two tasks: (1) explore the ways in which the three participating teachers used scaffolding strategies in the L2 writing classroom, and (2) gain access to the students' perceptions of their teachers' scaffolding strategies. The researchers addressed these tasks by using multiple data sources such as observations, interviews, and a survey to document the ways in which the students experienced their teachers' scaffolding strategies in the writing classroom.

3. Methodology

The study sought answers that explored the most frequently used scaffolding strategies employed by the three-participating college EFL teachers in Kuwait, as well as the students' perceptions of their teachers' scaffolding strategies. Adopting a longitudinal design with multiple sources of data collection including classroom observations, interviews, and a "grounded" survey, this classroom-based study was conducted over the 4-month period of the fall semester of 2021-2022. Access was facilitated through a solicitation letter explaining the purpose of the research and assuring willing participants of confidentiality and anonymity in which the data collected in their classrooms will be used only for this study. "Letters of informed consent" were signed by all the participants and provided them with the option to drop out of the study whenever they chose to do so. The participants of the study were three EFL teachers and 79 college EFL students from three "intact classes" that taught English at the intermediate level (Patton, 2015). An intact class was defined by Patton as an already formed group of students prior to the conduct of the research study. No selection procedure was employed by the researchers but the entire three classes were used to represent the larger population of EFL college students in Kuwait.

3.1 Data Collection

Taber (2013) suggested that a classroom-based study needs to systematically utilize multiple data sources. Data collection included, therefore, audiotaped classroom observations, group interviews, and a survey that emerged from the data of the observations and group interviews. First, a total of 24 hours of classroom observations with fieldnotes were audiotaped and transcribed, with each teacher having been observed for four two-hour classes. In order to explore teachers' views on scaffolding strategies, the researchers conducted a total of six "semi-structured" one-hour group interviews with the three teachers (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). Interviews and observations were focused on the types of scaffolding strategies teachers employed at different junctures in the class period. After the initial system of codes and categories was revised and corroborated with data from the interviews with the teachers, a system of codes and categories was developed to identify the recurrent patterns of scaffolding strategies in the EFL writing class (Bazeley, 2021). Subsequently, the final system of codes and categories was transformed into a "grounded" survey instrument (Straus & Corbin, 1997) to measure students' perceptions of their teachers' scaffolding strategies. A reasonably high degree of agreement or inter-rater reliability between the two researchers was reached with nearly 95% consistency. The survey was distributed to the students at the end of the fall semester. The survey was uploaded online through Microsoft Forms for the students who agreed to participate in the study. The survey instrument consisted of 12 items which were put on a Likert scale of four intervals (i.e., strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). The complete survey was written using Microsoft Forms and then distributed to the students via their smart phones. The response rate was high (97%) and the total number of students who participated in answering the survey was N 75 out of 79 with four students who opted to drop out of the study.

3.2 Data Analysis

Two steps were used in the data analysis stage that included (1) coding and categorizing observations and interviews, and (2) generating descriptive statistics from the survey data. First, classroom observations and interviews consisted mostly of teachers' utterances that were subjected to an inter-rater reliability check to ensure a high degree of agreement that reached 95% in terms of assigning teachers' utterances to different scaffolding strategies. Coding and categorizing field notes and interviews focused on identifying each one of the four instructional scaffolding strategies with its frequency, percentage, and ranking. The Ethnograph 6.0, a software program for qualitative data analysis, helped the researchers with the task of determining the frequency with which certain scaffolding strategies were employed. Second, responses to the survey items were tabulated on a Microsoft spreadsheet. EXCEL was used to generate descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, rankings, and percentages for each scaffolding strategy. Finally, Table 1 displayed the frequency of each instructional scaffolding strategy, and Tables 2 and 3 contained student perceptions of teachers' instructional scaffolding strategies.

4. Findings

4.1 The Most Frequently-used Instructional Scaffolding Strategies

The first research question inquired about the frequency with which scaffolding strategies were employed by the three participating teachers. Table 1 displayed the frequency, ranking, and percentages of the various categories under each scaffolding strategy. The codes and categories from the field notes, observations, and interviews were documented to identify the strategies of instructional scaffolding employed by the three EFL teachers.

Based on a total of 24 hours of classroom observations, the most frequently employed strategy was rhetorical scaffolding (13 times) followed by prior knowledge scaffolding (12 times). Table 1 also revealed that the three teachers devoted less class time to contextual and language development scaffolding strategies. In sum, the three teachers leaned more heavily on the side of employing rhetorical scaffolding and prior knowledge scaffolding than on contextual scaffolding or language development scaffolding.

Table 1. Frequency of Use of Instructional Scaffolding Strategies

Instructional Scaffolding Strategies	Frequency (%)	Sub-Ranking	Frequency Total (%)	Total Ranking
Most Frequently Used				
1. Rhetorical Scaffolding				
a. Introduce genres of writing	6 (46.15%)	1	13 (35.50%)	1
b. Explain essay/paragraph organization	4 (30.77%)	2		
c. Use transitional words	3 (23.08%)	3		
2. Prior Knowledge Scaffolding				
a. Utilize prior knowledge	6 (50.00%)	1	12 (30.00%)	2
b. Link to previously taught contents	4 (33.33%)	2		
c. Highlight L1 influence on L2 writing	2 (16.67%)	3		
Less Frequently Used				
3. Contextual Scaffolding				
a. Contextualize tasks with supportive materials	4 (50.00%)	1	8 (20.00%)	3
b. Use graphic organizers	2 (25.00%)	2		
c. Use writing frames	2 (25.00%)	2		
4. Language Development Scaffolding				
a. Explicit instruction of grammar	4 (57.14%)	1	7 (17.50%)	4
b. Use substitution tables	2 (28.57%)	2		
c. Demonstrate types of sentences	1 (14.29%)	3		

The first category in the scaffolding framework emerged from classroom observations as writing teachers worked on the rhetorical conventions of writing formats for distinct types of paragraphs, paragraph organization and unity, and the meaning and significance of transitional words and phrases. Scaffolds introduced the rhetorical conventions of L2 academic writing at the introduction of each paragraph type (e.g., narrative, descriptive, sequence, problem-solution, cause-and-effect, and compare-and-contrast, etc.). Then the students were given tasks to complete using the instructions they received from their teachers about rhetorical conventions. Moreover, rhetorical scaffolding was employed by the teachers to raise the students' awareness by making them conscious of the differences between rhetorical devices in English versus Arabic.

The three teachers introduced genres of writing paragraphs more than 46% of the time of the rhetorical scaffolding strategies. Next, the three teachers explained the different ways essays and paragraphs were organized. Rhetorical organization occupied more than 30% of the time devoted to rhetorical scaffolding. Finally, the three teachers were observed to be working with their students on cohesive devices such as transitional words (e.g., although, moreover, otherwise, etc.) Scaffolding transitional words occupied more than 23%of rhetorical scaffolding time. The total frequency of use was 13 times of employing rhetorical scaffolding which ranked first among all the scaffolding strategies in terms of frequency of use.

The second most frequently used strategy was prior knowledge scaffolding. The teachers frequently referred to previous lessons and previously introduced information to establish the ground for new information. Scaffolds helped students build on prior knowledge and internalize new information relevant to the skills needed to complete the writing tasks. Furthermore, prior knowledge scaffolding was also frequently used to raise the conscience of students of the potential effects of L1 influence on their L2 writing. Prior knowledge scaffolding was employed 12 times by the 3 teachers in the course of the 24 hours of classroom observations. Table 1 showed the frequency, ranking, and percentage of the various categories under prior knowledge scaffolding. First, the three teachers frequently utilized students' prior knowledge at the beginning of each new topic (e.g., Who has heard of …..?) or

(What do you know about …..?). Utilizing prior knowledge was employed 50% of the time devoted to prior knowledge scaffolding. Next, the three teachers established a link between the current lesson and previously-taught content for more than 33% of the time. The three teachers raised students' awareness of the differences between the students' first language and English as an L2 whenever these differences influenced their writing in a negative way. This type of prior knowledge scaffolding took place more than 16% of the time. Overall, prior knowledge scaffolding ranked second after rhetorical scaffolding with 12 times of use in the three teachers' 24 hours of classroom observations.

Next, contextual scaffolding which involved the use of visual aids and graphic organizers was used by the three teachers 8 times in the 24 hours of classroom observations and reached a percentage of 20% of class time. Furthermore, the three teachers equally used both graphic organizers and writing frames for 25% frequency of use. Writing frames, for example, help students focus on a specific sentence structure in writing with a series of guided questions or sentence starters, used idioms and expressions required to complete a task. Moreover, graphic organizers such as T-charts and concept maps helped students to classify and express ideas in a systematic and organized manner. Contextual scaffolding was employed to a lesser extent than rhetorical or prior knowledge scaffolding in the L2 writing classes by the 3 teachers.

Finally, the least-frequently used scaffolding strategy was language development scaffolding. Table 1 showed that this strategy was utilized by teachers 7 times only which constituted 17.5% of class time. Explicit instruction of grammar ranked the most frequently used with a percentage of 57.14% of class time. Substitution tables were used 2 times and one of the three teachers was observed to demonstrate different types of sentences for 1 time only. Language development scaffolding can, nevertheless, take many forms in class. Overall, the three teachers have not utilized the full range of language development scaffolding in the L2 writing classroom.

4.2 Students' Perceptions of Instructional Scaffolding

The second research question targeted the students' perceptions of their teachers' scaffolding strategies. Table 2 focused on students' perceptions of rhetorical and prior knowledge scaffolding which emphasized scaffolding the knowledge of genres and making associations about the writing topics through learners' prior knowledge.

4.2.1 Perceptions of Rhetorical and Prior Knowledge Scaffolding Strategies

Table 2. Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Rhetorical Scaffolding and Prior Knowledge Scaffolding

Rhetorical and Prior Knowledge Scaffolding	Means	SD	Item Responses (%)			
			Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I. Rhetorical Scaffolding						
1. I benefited from the concept of writing genres introduced at the beginning of writing lesson.	3.61	0.49	67.90	32.10	0.00	0.00
2. Identifying the components of essay and paragraph organization helped me to formulate ideas in L2 writing.	3.37	0.61	52.17	43.87	3.95	0.00
3. Demonstrating transitional words and phrases assisted me in using them effectively in types of writing.	3.41	0.59	54.69	42.19	3.13	0.00
II. Prior Knowledge Scaffolding						
4. Associating the writing topic with students' background knowledge helped in learning new material.	3.79	0.41	83.10	16.9	0.00	0.00
5. Linking the writing topic with previously taught content helped in understanding the topic more clearly.	3.21	0.74	46.47	46.06	6.64	0.83
6. Raising awareness about L1 influence on L2 writing facilitated the completion of the writing task.	3.77	0.42	81.98	18.02	0.00	0.00

Note. 1=strongly disagree 4=strongly agree

Table 2 displayed the six survey items focused on the students' perceptions of rhetorical and prior knowledge scaffolding they encountered in class. The survey items 1 to 3 concerning rhetorical scaffolding focused on the early introduction of writing genres, essay and paragraph organization, as well as transitional words and phrases. The survey items 4 to 6 concerning prior knowledge scaffolding focused on tapping students' prior knowledge (i.e., schema) to make associations about the writing topics and the language required to complete the writing task. Most of the responses showed that the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the 6 solicited items which meant they displayed overall positive perceptions of their teachers' rhetorical and prior knowledge scaffolding.

The results for item 1 (M=3.61, SD=0.49) in rhetorical scaffolding indicated that most of the students agreed they benefited from the concept of writing genres introduced at the beginning of writing lessons. More specifically, 67.90% of the students strongly agreed and 32.10% agreed on the importance of early introduction of writing genres. Item 2 focused on explaining the components of essay and paragraph organization that helped students to formulate and classify ideas in L2 writing. Students' responses (M=3.37, SD=0.61) showed that 52.17% of the students strongly agreed and 43.87% agreed that the concept of essay and paragraph organization helped them compose their ideas in L2 writing. A minority of 3.95% of the students who faced difficulty in understanding essay and paragraph organization disagreed with this item. Group interview data revealed that most of the teachers believed that their students benefitted from exposure to different paragraphs and essay organizations in order to help them compose ideas in L2 writing. Moreover, item 3 targeted the notion that the use of transitional words and phrases helped students to use them effectively in writing. The results for item 3 (M=3.41, SD= 0.59) showed that while 54.69% of the students strongly agreed and 42.19% agreed on the importance of transitional words and phrases in L2 writing, only 3.13% of the students disagreed with this item and expressed the difficulty in mastering of transitional words and phrases in L2 writing.

Items 4, 5, and 6 focused on students' perceptions of prior knowledge scaffolding. The results indicated consistency on students' perceptions that they relied on their background knowledge to make associations with the writing topics. Moreover, students managed to link the writing topics with previously taught reading content, and teachers' use of the L1 for grammar explanations.

The results for item 4 (M=3.79, SD=0.41) indicated that 83.10% of the students strongly agreed and 16.90% agreed that students associated the writing topic with their background knowledge. When it came to linking the writing topic with previously taught reading content, the results for item 5 (M= 3.21, SD=0.74) showed variation in students' perceptions. While 46.47% of the students strongly agreed and 46.06% agreed with the benefits of linking the writing topic with previously taught reading content in understanding the topic clearly, only 6.64% of the students disagreed and 0.83% strongly disagreed. Most of the students expressed the need for linking more reading texts to exemplify the writing topics. Item 6 targeted using learners' L1 for grammar explanations to facilitate the use of grammatical structure in L2 writing. The results for item 8 (M=3.77, SD=0.42) indicated that 81.98% of the students strongly agreed and 18.02% agreed on using the L1 for grammar explanations to facilitate the understanding of grammatical rules in L2 writing.

4.2.2 Perceptions of Contextual and Language Development Scaffolding Strategies

Table 3 displayed the six survey items focused on the students' perceptions of contextual scaffolding and language development scaffolding in L2 writing.

Table 3 focused on students' perceptions of contextual scaffolding and language development scaffolding, which highlighted students' perceptions of organizing content information and the language required to complete writing tasks through teachers' use of contextual scaffolding materials. The survey items 1, 2, and 3 were related to contextual scaffolding and emphasized using supportive scaffolding materials (e.g., writing frames and graphic organizers) to support content organization in L2 writing. The survey items 4, 5, and 6 were related to language development scaffolding and highlighted the importance of enhancing vocabulary, grammar, and introducing types of sentences in L2 writing through the use of activities, substitution tables, and demonstrations of sentence structures. Most of the responses in Table 2 showed that the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the 6 solicited items which meant they displayed overall positive perceptions of their teachers' rhetorical and prior knowledge scaffolding. However, compared to the responses in Table 3, most of the responses in 6 survey items showed some variations among students' perceptions which may be attributed to students' performances that varied among students to some extent.

Table 3. Students' perceptions toward their teachers' contextual and language development scaffolding

Contextual and Language Development Scaffolding	Means	SD	Item Responses (%)			
			Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I. Contextual Scaffolding						
1. Using tables and charts facilitated the comprehension of writing tasks.	3.17	0.72	45.38	42.86	11.76	0.00
2. Writing frames illuminated the writing steps from the beginning to complete the final tasks.	3.03	0.53	19.38	72.69	7.93	0.00
3. Graphic organizers were useful in the explanations of the writing process.	2.96	0.84	37.84	45.95	14.41	1.80
II. Language Development Scaffolding						
4. Vocabulary review activities highlighted the unfamiliar words needed to complete writing tasks.	3.44	0.66	62.02	32.56	5.43	0.00
5. Substitution tables helped students practice new grammar patterns in the writing topics.	2.89	0.63	20.28	62.21	17.51	0.00
6. Demonstrating distinct types of sentences helped me to use various sentences to complete writing tasks.	2.77	0.91	38.46	46.15	16.35	2.88

Note. 1=strongly disagree 4=strongly agree

The results for item 1 in Table 3 (M=3.17, SD=0.72) indicated that most of the students agreed that using tables and charts facilitated the comprehension of writing tasks. Specifically, 45.38% of the students strongly agreed and 42.86% agreed on the importance of early introduction of writing genres. However, 11.76% of the students disagreed and expressed the need for more practice to overcome the challenges of using tables and charts to facilitate the comprehension of writing tasks. Moreover, Item 2 focused on the use of writing frames to clarify the steps of writing to complete the tasks. Students' responses (M=3.03, SD=0.53) showed that 19.38% of the students strongly agreed and 72.69% agreed that writing frames in the L2 (e.g., stem sentences) clearly demonstrated the steps of writing and thus facilitated writing in the L2. However, 7.93% of the students expressed the need for more practice in order to fully benefit from employing writing frames in the writing of L2. Furthermore, item 3 targeted the utility of graphic organizers in the explanations of the writing process. The results for item 9 (M=2.96, SD= 0.84) showed that while 37.84% of the students strongly agreed and 45.95% agreed on the benefits of graphic organizers (e.g., T-chart or concept map) in explaining the writing process, only 14.41% of the students disagreed and 1.80% strongly disagreed that they did not fully grasp different organizers with different genres.   Most of the students expressed the need for more practice to improve their applications of graphic organizers in L2 writing.

The results for item 4 (M=3.44, SD=0.66) indicated that 62.02% of the students strongly agreed and 32.56% agreed on the benefits of vocabulary review activities (e.g., bingo) to highlight the unfamiliar words required to complete writing tasks. However, 5.43% of the students disagreed with item 4. Moreover, Item 5 tackled the use of substitution tables to practice new grammar patterns in writing tasks. In item 5, most of the responses (M=2.89, SD=0.63) indicated that while 20.28% of the students strongly agreed and 62.21% agreed with the benefits of substitution in practicing new grammatical patterns in writing tasks, 17.51% of the students disagreed with the item 5 and expressed the need for more practice with the use of substitution tables.   Finally, Item 6 focused on the idea that demonstrating types of sentences helped students to use various sentences to complete writing tasks. Most of the responses (M=2.77, SD=0.91) indicated that while 38.46% of the students strongly agreed and 46.15% agreed on the importance of introducing types of sentences in writing tasks, 16.35% of the students disagreed and 2.88% strongly disagreed. Facing challenges in using various types of sentences to complete the writing tasks, most of the students expressed the need for more practice to compose simple, compound, and complex sentences in writing.

4.3 Discussion

Mahan (2022) was interested in specifying the main scaffolding strategies employed in the CLIL classroom and the frequency with which some scaffolding strategies were used more than others. Following Mahan (2022), the present study explored the most-frequently used scaffolding strategies in the EFL classroom. The findings revealed that while the most frequently used strategies were rhetorical and prior knowledge scaffolding, the less frequently used strategies were contextual and language development scaffolding. The findings of the present study showed that writing teachers utilized scaffolding strategies and related classroom tasks to support the L2 writing of EFL students. The review explored studies that have investigated scaffolding strategies in the writing classroom. For example, Bhowmilk and Chaudari (2022), Elachachi (2015), and Jwa (2020) conducted studies that focused on using scaffolding to teach the rhetorical conventions of English writing. The present study showed that in the process of teaching writing, the three English teachers used rhetorical scaffolding to promote their students' awareness of English rhetorical conventions and to add to their knowledge about coherence and cohesive devices needed to write smoothly and coherently in English. The students also had positive perceptions of their teachers and reported that they benefitted from teacher scaffolding about transitions and their logical meanings, and their importance in adding coherence to English writing. Moreover, in terms of utilizing students' previous knowledge, Gallagher and Colohan (2017), and Walqui (2006) documented the ways in which teachers employed students' previous knowledge as a scaffold from which to learn new knowledge in the classroom. The present study also revealed that the three English teachers used students' L1 previous knowledge as a foundation from which to establish new knowledge about the L2. The three teachers then focused on interacting with the students about rhetorical conventions and at the same time highlighting the areas of similarity and difference in rhetorical information between their first language (L1) and the second language (L2). As far as graphic organizers are concerned, researchers have, additionally, indicated that graphic organizers may be used as scaffolds to concretize abstract ideas and concepts thus making them more understandable for their students (e.g., Karimi et al., 2020; Jeon et al., 2022; Mora-González et al., 2018). The present study showed that the three teachers employed contextual scaffolding strategies such as graphic organizers to make abstract ideas concrete and easier to comprehend for their students. Therefore, contextual scaffolding helped students deepen their knowledge in order to see the relations of the parts to the whole of the topic. Finally, a group of studies also showed that scaffolding strategies were employed to support the language development aspects of the L2 writing of English language learners (e.g., Gibbons, 2015; Hasan & Karim, 2019; Morton, 2015; Park et al., 2019). The present study showed that when students needed support to write effectively in English, the three teachers employed language development scaffolding strategies with students to interact about grammatical rules and vocabulary items through substitution tables and model sentences to enable students to produce grammatically and lexically correct sentences.

4.4 Conclusions

Regarding the first research question, Table 1 showed that the most frequently used scaffolding strategy in this study was that of rhetorical scaffolding with 13 occurrences in the whole 24 hours of classroom observations of the 3 participating EFL teachers. Next, prior knowledge scaffolding was used for 12 occurrences which made a close second to rhetorical scaffolding. The third frequently used strategy was contextual scaffolding which was employed 8 times by the 3 teachers. The least frequently used strategy was language development scaffolding which was used 7 times during the entire 24 hours of classroom observations.

The second research question targeted students' perceptions of their teachers' scaffolding strategies as reflected in Tables 2 and 3. It was perceived by the students that rhetorical and prior knowledge scaffolding were highly beneficial. They felt their teachers did a remarkable job of providing them with knowledge needed to be familiar with the rhetorical information of English writing. They also felt the teachers skillfully used their pre-existing knowledge as a springboard from which to construct new knowledge about writing topics. As far as contextual scaffolding and language development scaffolding are concerned, the students' perceptions of these strategies were mixed. They were required to do something with the graphic organizers to understand them and the same goes for grammar exercises. In these cases, the students felt they were useful but, unfortunately, they were not frequently used by their teachers. The students were left with the feeling that they needed more practice opportunities on both contextual and language development scaffolding.

5. Implications for EFL Pedagogy

There is a need to orient EFL teachers through training courses on scaffolding strategies and their optimal applications in the writing classroom. While the following is, by no means, a conclusive list of strategies, it can help teachers start applying scaffolding in the writing classroom. English teachers can view scaffolding strategies

to support L2 writing as a coherent construct that consists of four strategies: (1) rhetorical scaffolding which familiarizes students with the rhetorical conventions of English, (2) prior knowledge scaffolding that uses students' previous knowledge to increase students' awareness of potential L1 influences, (3) contextual scaffolding that demonstrates abstract concepts using graphic organizers and picture displays, and (4) language development scaffolding that supports the L2 writing of EFL students.

6. Implications for Future Research

Educational researchers are looking for classroom methodologies and approaches that help create a learner-supportive environment in the classroom. There is, thus, a need for research on scaffolding strategies for improving not only EFL students' skills in writing, but also in reading, speaking, and listening skills, as well as in vocabulary and grammar acquisition. While the present study was conducted in Kuwait in the EFL classroom to explore scaffolding by tapping into students' perceptions, researchers in EFL countries are encouraged to conduct other types of studies on scaffolding. Teachers can also construct action research studies to add to the knowledge base on scaffolding because they are the true practitioners of scaffolding and there is a need to explore their views about its potential benefits and/or shortcomings.

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