

INVESTIGATING SCAFFOLDING DESCRIPTIVE SPEAKING TASKS USING A LEVEL 2 LEARNING MODULE TO ENHANCE EFL STUDENTS' ORAL EXPRESSION AT MTS NWDI PERIAN

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate how descriptive speaking tasks based on scaffolding, implemented through Level 2 learning modules, can support the oral expression skills of EFL students at MTs NWDI Perian. This module provides speaking guidance through simple sentence templates, such as 'This is my friend, Rina. She has long hair...', so that students are not asked to speak freely from the start, but are given a structure and model of speech to build sentences. Based on speaking skills pedagogy, the guided output strategy can reduce students' cognitive load, help them focus on conveying meaning, and organise their ideas coherently. This approach is assumed to be able to increase speaking confidence and reduce speaking anxiety that often arises in junior high school students, such as confusion when wanting to speak, fear of making grammatical mistakes, and limited vocabulary. This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design. Data were collected through classroom observations during speaking sessions, semi-structured interviews with 10 students, and documentation of oral assignment results during the learning process. The data were analysed thematically to identify patterns that emerged related to students' emotional responses, language strategies, and their participation during interactions. The results of the study are expected to show that scaffolding in descriptive speaking tasks acts as a bridge from memorisation to communication, so that students can speak more spontaneously, confidently, and meaningfully in learning English as a foreign language.

Keywords: *Scaffolding, guided output, speaking confidence, speaking anxiety*

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1. INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language (EFL) learning at secondary school level often focuses on speaking skills as the most tangible form of communication in the classroom. This is in line with Nazara (2011), who states that speaking skill has always been given vital importance throughout the history of foreign language teaching. However, in practice, many students experience difficulties when asked to express their ideas orally, as Hinkel (2011) states that gaining command over speaking skills is a challenging task. Common situations such as being asked to describe a friend or an object often cause students to stop speaking because they do not know how to start a sentence, are afraid of making grammatical mistakes, or do not have sufficient vocabulary. These difficulties are not only linguistic, but also psychological. Boonkit (2010) emphasizes that speaking difficulties commonly arise from limited language resources as well as affective barriers such as anxiety and low self-confidence, which directly hinder oral performance. When students fail to express their ideas, their confidence decreases and their anxiety about speaking increases, causing them to avoid participating even more.

According to Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, the process of language learning develops through social interaction and gradual support from the learning environment. The concept of scaffolding refers to temporary assistance provided by teachers, peers, or learning materials to guide students in completing tasks that they cannot do independently. This theory was initially introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) and later aligned with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory (1978), which explains that scaffolding helps learners transition from assisted performance to independent performance. This assistance includes example sentences, keywords, linguistic structures, and prompt questions. This is in line with the findings of Hammond and Gibbons (2001), who emphasise that effective scaffolding in language learning must provide structured support in the form of language models, guided questions, and linguistic frameworks to help students complete tasks that they cannot do independently. In the early stages, scaffolding helps students overcome confusion, then is gradually removed as they begin to speak independently. This is in line with the explanation by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), who state that scaffolding is provided as temporary assistance that will be given gradually when students are able to complete tasks without support. Thus, scaffolding acts as a 'bridge' from language incompetence to independence.

In speaking skills, scaffolding is closely related to the psychological aspects of students. This is supported by Manipuspika (2018), who found that higher levels of anxiety significantly reduced students' willingness to communicate, indicating that psychological readiness plays a crucial role in oral performance. Speaking confidence arises when students feel they have a foundation—whether sentence structure, speech patterns, or teacher support—to convey ideas meaningfully. When students feel guided, cognitive pressure is reduced and their focus shifts to the content of the message, a process consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which states that emotional support reduces anxiety and facilitates language performance. Conversely, speaking anxiety arises when students lack a clear basis for speaking, causing them to fear making mistakes, feel embarrassed, or be reluctant to speak, as emphasised by Jones (2004), who found that learners often fear appearing incompetent in front of their peers. Previous research also shows that speaking anxiety is one of the main obstacles in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at secondary school level, as indicated by Manipuspika (2018), who found a strong negative correlation between anxiety and students' willingness to communicate. Students tend to remain silent, give very short answers, or wait for other classmates to speak first before gaining confidence.

The communicative approach (Communicative Language Teaching/CLT) offers a learning direction that focuses on the use of language for real communication purposes in everyday situations. Description-based activities in CLT, such as introducing friends or describing objects, provide students with opportunities to speak based on their life contexts, which is in line with Hymes' (1972) statement that communicative competence involves the appropriate use of language in social realities and communication contexts. However, communicative learning often faces obstacles if teachers only give speaking instructions without linguistic support. As noted by Littlewood (2004), many students struggle with communicative tasks when teachers assume that students can 'use language freely' without adequate structural guidance, leading to frustration and decreased engagement. In such situations, students are asked to 'speak freely,' which increases anxiety and decreases verbal participation. Therefore, combining CLT with scaffolding can provide a more structured and secure speaking experience for students. This is supported by Gibbons (2002), who argues that scaffolding in communicative tasks

provides learners with the necessary linguistic framework, gradually guiding them towards independent and confident communication.

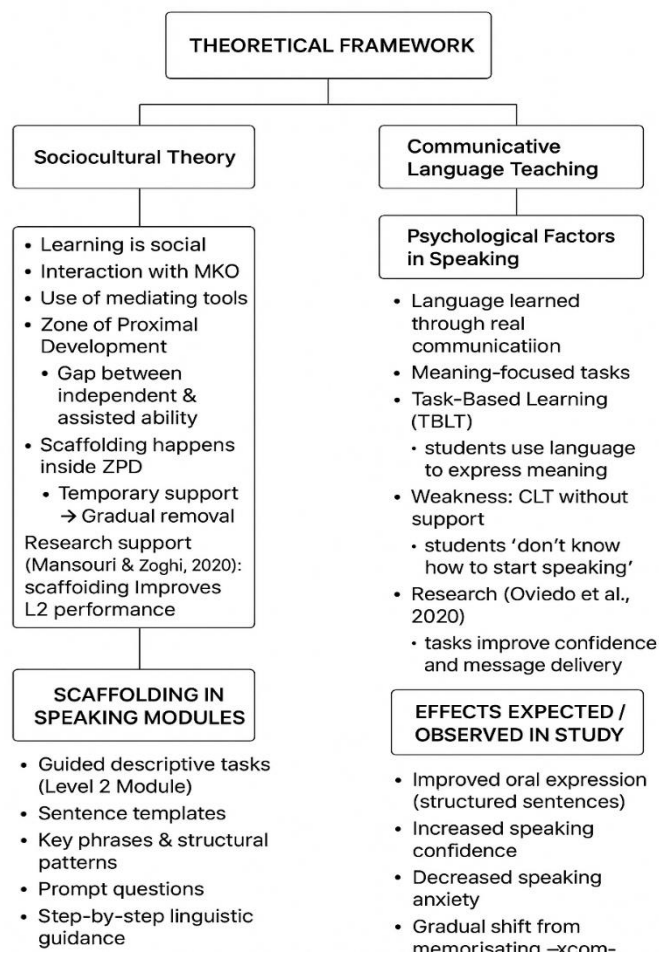
Several previous studies have discussed task-based speaking activities at secondary school level, but most have focused on activities such as role play, group discussions, or the use of audiovisual media. For example, Putri (2018) found that role play-based TBLT can improve the fluency of junior high school students but still causes anxiety when students are asked to perform without clear guidance. Sari and Rahmawati (2020) examined the use of group discussion tasks in EFL classes at the senior high school level and showed that discussion tasks helped increase participation, but did not provide sufficient linguistic support for low-ability students. In addition, Hapsari (2021) reported that the use of videos as a trigger for speaking tasks could increase motivation, but students still had difficulty constructing sentences without scaffolding. In the context of language learning, however, speaking is one of the productive skills that is just as important as writing and must be developed in a balanced manner to support effective communication (Boonkit, 2010). However, many studies also show that task-based activities often cause psychological pressure for students. A number of previous studies describe that language learners often experience stress, nervousness, or anxiety when asked to speak, which is seen as a 'mental block' to the use of English (Hilgard, Atkinson, & Atkinson, 1971 in Scovel, 1991). This anxiety has a negative impact on the learning process and is one of the most widely studied variables in educational psychology due to its strong influence on language performance (Horwitz, 2001).

Various studies show that a classroom environment that is too formal and demands high accuracy actually increases speaking anxiety, while a more collaborative learning environment tends to reduce student stress levels. Koch and Terrell (1991), Young (1991), and Price (1991) found that oral presentation activities are the highest trigger of anxiety in language classes. Tanveer (2007) also emphasises that students often put additional pressure on themselves when trying to memorise material and worry that they will not be able to remember everything when performing. Furthermore, a study by Jones (2004) shows that speaking anxiety often stems from a fear of making mistakes and a fear of being seen as stupid or incompetent by peers. This concern is closely related to students' desire to maintain a positive image, as explained in the study by Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) on perfectionism in language learning.

Considering these limitations, this study investigates the use of Level 2 learning modules that present scaffolding-based descriptive speaking tasks in a real context at MTs NWDI Perian. These modules provide sentence templates, example phrases, and descriptive structures that help students build ideas gradually, from simple sentences to more complete explanations. This approach is expected to not only help students convey meaning, but also build confidence, reduce speaking anxiety, and lead them from memorisation to communication. This approach is in line with the theories of Gibbons (2002) and Hammond and Gibbons (2001), which emphasise that scaffolding provides structured language support so that students can move from guided language production to more independent language use. This gradual support not only helps students convey meaning, but also reduces affective pressure, as explained by Krashen (1982) through the Affective Filter Hypothesis, that lower anxiety allows students to process input more effectively and improves student speaking performance. Furthermore, providing a language framework helps reduce the fear of making mistakes, which is often a source of speaking anxiety (Jones, 2004), allowing students to move from rote learning patterns to more spontaneous and meaningful communication. By examining students' experiences during the learning process, this study seeks to fill the gaps in previous

research and provide practical contributions to speaking learning at the junior high school level.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



The sociocultural theory concept introduced by Vygotsky forms the main basis of this study. According to Vygotsky, the learning process occurs socially through interaction with more competent individuals, such as teachers or peers, and through the use of mediating tools. Within this framework, learning is not only an internal process, but also the construction of knowledge built through shared experiences. One important concept in this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the distance between the abilities that students possess independently and the abilities that can be achieved with assistance. Scaffolding is a form of pedagogical support provided in the ZPD, in the form of temporary assistance that enables students to perform tasks that they initially could not complete on their own. This assistance is gradually removed when students become independent. International research shows that the application of scaffolding has been proven effective in improving language skills through gradual learning that encourages active participation. For example, in a study by Mansouri & Zoghi (2020), scaffolding instruction was found to significantly improve students' language skills and comprehension in an EFL context.

In the context of English language learning, the communicative approach or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a relevant foundation. CLT emphasises the importance of using language in real and meaningful situations, rather than simply practising structures or memorising vocabulary. Task-based activities in CLT require students to use language to interact, explain, and convey meaning. Research conducted

by Oviedo et al. (2020) shows that task-based learning has a direct impact on students' confidence and their ability to convey messages orally. However, several studies also highlight the weaknesses of implementing CLT without adequate linguistic support, where students tend to be passive because they are asked to 'speak freely' without guidance or structure. This results in speaking anxiety and failure to achieve communicative goals. In such conditions, scaffolding becomes an important element to complement CLT, as it provides structures and models that help students begin language production before gradually removing assistance.

Psychological aspects in speaking learning also play an important role. Speaking confidence is a factor that determines students' courage to take risks in language use. Students with high levels of confidence tend not only to speak more often, but also to be more flexible in expressing their ideas. Research by Rahimi & Ghonsooly (2021) found that increased speaking self-efficacy is directly related to the frequency of oral production and students' courage to face mistakes. Conversely, speaking anxiety is one of the most powerful inhibiting factors in EFL learning, especially at the secondary school level. Horwitz (1986) showed that speaking anxiety causes students to avoid using language, give very short answers, and often stop speaking for fear of making mistakes. This condition is more intense among beginner learners who do not yet have a stable language structure. Research by Sulistiyo et al. (2020) confirms that when students feel they lack linguistic support, their anxiety levels increase, which ultimately reduces their engagement in learning.

Scaffolding in the form of teaching modules has the potential to help students overcome these linguistic and emotional barriers. Modules containing guided descriptive speaking tasks provide examples, key phrases, sentence structure sequences, and prompt questions that help students organise their ideas step by step. Research conducted by Sitorus & Sipayung (2021) shows that scaffolding not only improves speaking skills but also reduces anxiety because students feel they have clear references when speaking. In other words, scaffolding provides psychological security: students do not feel 'left alone' in verbal tasks. When scaffolding is gradually removed, students begin to build language independence, and self-confidence increases through successful speaking experiences.

Although previous literature shows the effectiveness of scaffolding, most studies still focus on the context of writing or adult learners. Research reviewing the relationship between task-based speaking scaffolding and psychological dimensions—particularly speaking confidence and speaking anxiety in junior high school students is still limited. Furthermore, research integrating structured teaching modules with a communicative approach, rather than just spontaneous teacher strategies in the classroom, is rarely studied. In the context of madrasahs such as MTs NWDI Perian, character, school culture, and student profiles also provide new dimensions that have not been widely explored in international literature. Therefore, this study fills this gap by exploring how descriptive task scaffolding in Level 2 modules can help students develop speaking skills, increase confidence, and reduce speaking anxiety in junior high school EFL settings.

3. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore how descriptive speaking tasks based on scaffolding applied through Level 2 learning modules affect the oral expression, speaking confidence, and speaking anxiety of EFL students at MTs NWDI Perian. A qualitative approach was chosen because the phenomenon being studied is naturalistic and relates to the real learning experiences of students in the classroom. The focus of the study was not on quantitative test scores or results, but rather on the

meaning, perceptions, changes in speaking behaviour, and internal processes of students when interacting with the scaffolding provided through the module. The descriptive design allowed the researcher to describe the phenomenon in detail without manipulating variables, so that the learning process continued naturally as part of the school's learning routine.

The research was conducted at MTs NWDI Perian in grades VIII, which consisted of 18 students. Participants were selected purposively because students at this level were in the early stages of learning to speak and still faced various obstacles, such as confusion about how to start speaking, fear of making grammatical mistakes, and limited vocabulary. These students also tended to show anxiety when asked to explain something orally in front of the class. The Level 2 learning module was used as part of regular learning activities, not as an experimental intervention, so that the learning process continued to follow the authentic classroom context without additional treatment.

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations were conducted while students performed descriptive speaking tasks, such as describing a friend, an object, or themselves using sentence templates provided in the module. During the observations, researchers recorded verbal behaviour, speaking pauses, the use of sentence structures such as "She has...", "He is...", and students' reactions to scaffolding support, whether in the form of example sentences, teacher prompting, or peer assistance. Field notes were used to record students' psychological dynamics, including signs of confidence such as volunteering to speak, and signs of anxiety such as silence, hesitation, or stopping mid-sentence.

The data was then reinforced through semi-structured interviews with 10 students selected based on their varying abilities and levels of participation. The interviews aimed to explore the students' personal experiences, such as which parts of the module helped them speak, factors that made them afraid, and changes in their feelings after doing descriptive speaking activities with scaffolding. The semi-structured approach gave students the freedom to recount their experiences, while allowing researchers to ask follow-up questions when important issues arose. Research documentation included audio or video recordings of speaking activities, written assignments in the form of student descriptions, photos of classroom activities, and teacher reflection notes. The documentation served as additional evidence to reinforce the findings from observations and interviews.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected relevant information, created initial coding, and grouped the data based on themes such as 'template support helps courage', 'vocabulary difficulties', or 'scaffolding reduces anxiety'. In the data presentation stage, the researcher compiled the findings in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, or thematic categories to understand patterns in student responses. The final stage was drawing conclusions, which was done repeatedly by comparing findings between data sources until consistency was achieved. The verification process was carried out by reviewing field notes, interview transcripts, and documentation to ensure that the findings were not assumptive.

Data validity was maintained through several strategies. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from observations, interviews, and documentation. Member checking was carried out by confirming the researchers' interpretations with several students to ensure that the meanings captured were in line with their experiences. In addition, the researcher also compiled an audit trail that recorded the

analysis steps so that the research process was transparent and traceable. The researcher's continuous involvement in the class was also carried out so that the observations were not momentary but reflected the actual learning conditions.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to analyse how the implementation of descriptive speaking tasks through the Level 2 learning module affects the speaking ability (oral expression), speaking confidence, and speaking anxiety of EFL students at MTs NWDI Perian. The results of the study were grouped into three main themes based on observation, interview and documentation data, as follows: (1) **Development of speaking ability**, (2) **increased confidence**, and (3) **decreased speaking anxiety**.

1) Development of speaking ability

The majority of students significantly increased their ability to construct descriptive sentences once the Level 2 module was introduced, according to the findings of the class observation. Many kids initially answered with just one or two words, constructed simple sentences, and had trouble pronouncing words correctly. But after a few classes utilizing phrase structures like "This is my friend...She has...He is...She likes...They are....We have...etc", the students gradually began to produce more complete and structured sentences. Although the module uses techniques such as memorising formulas or sentences, they can build sentences in their own style.

The pupils have progressed from using single words to creating meaningful descriptive phrases, according to the results of their speaking assignments. Students, for instance, who at first just said: "My friend... tall... kind", "you....wise....smart" "They...arrogant....stingy" etc. It then developed into: "This is my friend Aisyah. She has long hair and she is very kind She is tall. She is very smart. She likes to play and draw." "I have a Cat. It has a yellow colour and blue eyes. it body is small, soft and fat. I love my cat because i took care of it since childhood" This demonstrates how scaffolding aids students in moving from simply memorizing words to creating coherent sentences. Instead of restricting students' creativity, the module's structure provides a foundation for language that aids in the development of their ideas.

2) Increased confidence

Significant changes were also seen in the students' courage to speak. At the beginning of the programme, only a few students were willing to speak in front of the class. Most students avoided eye contact and preferred to remain silent. However, as time went on, more and more students voluntarily raised their hands and tried to speak. Interview data reinforced these findings. One student said, 'It's easier to speak now because I know the pattern. I used to be afraid because I didn't know where to start.' Another student stated, 'The example sentences in the module are helpful. I just replace the words and I can speak.' These results show that scaffolding builds students' psychological readiness to speak. When students have language guidance, they feel more confident and are no longer confused when they have to express their ideas.

3) Decreased speaking anxiety

A decrease in anxiety about speaking was clearly evident during the learning process. Based on classroom observations, students who initially showed signs of anxiety, such as avoiding eye contact, being reluctant to talk to teachers or peers, speaking very softly, or choosing to remain silent, gradually became calmer and more willing to try. Most students stated that they felt more prepared when they had to

speak because the module provided sentence patterns and examples that could be used as a guide. Thus, the examples of sentence patterns could be the beginning of a gradual growth in courage. It was this feeling of preparedness that reduced their anxiety levels.

These findings are consistent with Horwitz's (2001) view that language anxiety can have a negative impact on the learning process, especially when students feel that they lack sufficient language skills or structure. In this study, scaffolding served to reduce cognitive pressure so that students no longer felt empty when they had to start speaking. The module used also created a more friendly and less stressful learning environment, something that according to Koch and Terrell (1991) and Young (1991) can help reduce anxiety because overly formal or demanding classroom environments often trigger excessive stress for students, causing them to feel depressed and afraid.

The fear of making mistakes is one of the biggest triggers of anxiety (Price, 1991; Jones, 2004). This tendency can decrease with the inclusion of example sentences and descriptive structures in the module. Students feel that they 'will not make a complete mistake' because there is a pattern to follow, so the fear of being seen as stupid or incompetent by their peers is reduced. This is in line with the findings of Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) about "perfectionism", who explain that anxiety about speaking often arises from students' desire to maintain a positive image and avoid linguistic errors.

Interview data support these results. One student stated, "*Aku selalu takut kalau mau ngomong kak karena teman-teman bisa ngejek nanti. Akan tetapi, kalo bisa kita pahami polanya mudah sebenarnya*". Another student said, "*Gapapa salah dikit kak. Polanya yang terpenting dan contohnya juga. Apalagi mudah dipahami itu.*" In addition, there were also students who said, "*Aku malu kak karena kalau salah aku bakal dibilang sok-sokan tetapi kalau kita sering baca modulnya dan mendengarkan penjelasan guru pasti mudah paham dan kita bisa menirukan.*" In addition, several students admitted that they no longer felt pressured to memorise long material before presentations because they memorised the patterns. According to Tanveer (2007), this pressure can actually increase anxiety and make students more likely to blank out when speaking.

Consistent linguistic support through scaffolding helps students reduce fear, increase psychological safety, and make them more confident in participating in speaking activities. This shows that the reduction in anxiety is not only due to repeated practice, but primarily because of the presence of language guidance that provides students with a sense of control and certainty when they have to express themselves.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the application of descriptive speaking tasks through Level 2 scaffolding-based learning modules has a strong positive impact on the speaking skills, confidence, and speaking anxiety of EFL students at MTs NWDI Perian. The scaffolding provided through sentence patterns, example phrases, and descriptive structures not only helped students construct more complete and structured sentences, but also facilitated their transition from memorisation to more independent and meaningful communication. This development was evident in the significant changes in students' language production—from the use of one or two words to longer, clearer, and more coherent descriptive sentences.

In addition to linguistic improvement, this module also plays an important role in building students' confidence. Concrete language support makes students feel more prepared when they have to speak, thereby increasing their courage to participate. This feeling of preparedness also reduces their level of speaking anxiety. In line with the views of Horwitz (2001), Koch and Terrell (1991), Young (1991), and Tanveer (2007), the findings of this study show that speaking anxiety can be significantly reduced when students are provided with linguistic guidance, a friendly classroom environment, an informal atmosphere, and opportunities to learn without excessive pressure.

Based on these findings, there are several important implications for learning practices.

1. Teachers need to recognise that speaking anxiety is a real condition experienced by many students and needs to be actively addressed through emotional support strategies and non-judgmental approaches.
2. The application of a communicative approach enriched with scaffolding is highly recommended to provide a sense of security as well as opportunities to practise speaking in meaningful contexts.
3. Teachers need to create a more friendly, informal, and supportive classroom environment so that students can speak without feeling pressured.
4. Students need to be encouraged not to be afraid of making mistakes. Sensitive correction techniques that do not embarrass students can help reduce this fear.
5. Formative assessment and gradual feedback should be prioritised over summative assessment so that students do not feel that their mistakes will have a direct impact on their final grades. In addition, learning that begins with simple, gradual steps can provide an important sense of early success that builds motivation and reduces anxiety.

The findings of this study indicate that scaffolding is not only a linguistic strategy but also a pedagogical approach that can provide emotional, psychological, and cognitive support for students. The implementation of this scaffolding-based module can be an effective alternative to improve the quality of speaking learning at the junior high school level, while also providing practical contributions for teachers in creating language learning that is more joyful, meaningful, and mindful for students.

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