

# APPLYING SCAFFOLDING TO ENHANCE A2-LEVEL STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS AT AN ENGLISH CENTER IN HANOI: AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the effectiveness of scaffolding techniques in improving A2-level students' English speaking skills and their attitudes toward these methods. Conducted at a private English center in Hanoi, the research involved 16 learners in a 12-week communication course. A mixed-methods approach was used, with data collected through pre/post-tests, questionnaires, and class observations. Results showed significant improvements in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction. Students also reported higher motivation, confidence, and participation. Scaffolding strategies such as guided practice, feedback, and group work were found to align well with learners' needs. The study recommends applying scaffolding not only in speaking lessons but also in other language skills.*

**Keywords:** *A2-level, attitudes toward, scaffolding techniques, speaking skills, mixed-method approach*

## I. Introduction

English is essential in today's globalized world, with increasing demand for proficiency, especially in Vietnam. A2-level learners struggle with speaking due to grammar-focused instruction and limited real-world practice, which affects fluency and confidence. Scaffolding techniques offer useful support, improving communication skills and confidence. In Vietnam's exam-oriented system, scaffolding helps students go beyond tests and engage in real-world communication. This study aims to explore how scaffolding enhances A2-level students' speaking skills, promoting a more

communicative, learner-centered approach to English teaching. The main goal is to examine its impact on learners' speaking proficiency and communication ability. Here are the objectives of the study:

- To examine the effectiveness of scaffolding techniques in enhancing A2-level students' speaking skills in English.
- To find out students' attitudes toward the application of scaffolding techniques to enhance their English-speaking skills.

These objectives aim to deepen understanding of how scaffolding techniques

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can be applied to support and improve speaking skills for A2-level learners.

Given the background information mentioned above, this research aims to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do scaffolding techniques enhance A2-level students' English-speaking skills?

- What are A2-level students' attitudes toward the use of scaffolding techniques in improving their English speaking skills?

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1. Definition of speaking skills

Speaking skills have been widely researched and discussed by many scholars. Chaney and Burk (1998) defines speaking as the process of building and sharing meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols. Thornbury (2005) views speaking as a tool for expressing ideas and interacting in real-life contexts, emphasizing its communicative function. Similarly, Brown (1994) highlights speaking as an interactive process of constructing meaning through the generation, reception, and interpretation of information, involving both verbal language and nonverbal cues such as facial expressions.

Byrne (1984) supports the idea that speaking is a two-way exchange involving both productive and receptive skills. Nunan (2003) further stresses that speaking is a productive skill requiring the structured use of verbal expressions to convey meaning, from telling stories to giving opinions or making requests. Spratt et al. (2005) also view speaking as the use of speech to communicate meaningful ideas.

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, speaking skills refer to one's ability and knowledge to

communicate effectively. Brown (2007) outlines key aspects: imitation, grammatical accuracy, short conversations, responding to requests, exchanging information, and extended speech. Overall, speaking is a dynamic and interactive process that plays a central role in human communication.

### 2.2. Key components of speaking skills

Speaking competence involves more than just knowing grammar and vocabulary. Goh and Burns (2012) identify three main components: language and discourse knowledge, communication strategies, and core speaking skills.

Language knowledge includes grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse structure for social interaction. Communication strategies help learners manage language gaps, while core speaking skills focus on fluency and conversation flow.

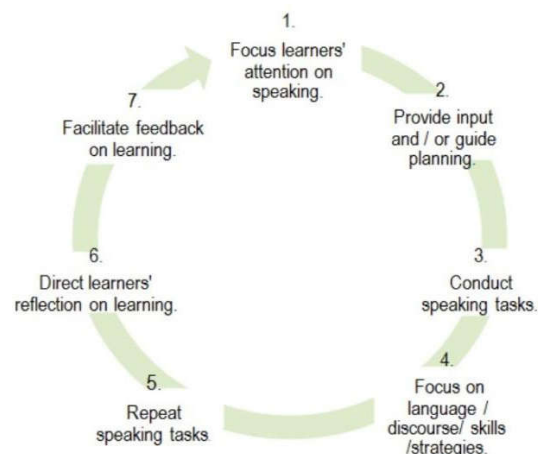


Figure 1. The teaching - speaking cycle (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 153)

### Scaffolding techniques in the teaching process

True speaking competence is achieved when learners can integrate these three components to communicate effectively in real-life situations. Because mastering these overlapping skills

simultaneously is a complex process, this research utilizes scaffolding techniques to provide structured support. This framework guides the development of lesson plans and activities, ensuring that each component of speaking ability is systematically built step by step.

### ***2.3. The concept of scaffolding***

Scaffolding refers to the temporary support an educator provides to enable learners to complete tasks beyond their independent reach (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), it acts as a bridge between a learner's actual developmental level and their potential level of achievement. The essence of scaffolding lies in its adaptive and fading nature: guidance and tools are calibrated to the student's progress and are gradually removed as the learner gains autonomy and competence (Rasmussen, 2001; Burns & Joyce, 2005).

### ***2.4. Characteristics of scaffolding***

According to Pol, Volman, and Beishuizen (2010), effective scaffolding in teaching includes three main features: contingency, fading, and transfer of responsibility.

- Contingency means adapting support to the learner's current level. As Burns and Joyce (2005) emphasize, timely and temporary support must match students' needs to be effective.

- Fading involves gradually reducing help as learners become more capable. Teachers challenge students by breaking tasks into manageable steps, encouraging deeper understanding (Burns & Joyce, 2005).

- Transfer of responsibility occurs when students begin to take control of

their own learning. As support decreases, they become more independent and able to apply their skills to new tasks (Pol et al., 2010).

### ***2.5. Scaffolding techniques for English learners***

Scaffolding techniques are instructional strategies that support English learners in acquiring a second language. Walqui (2006), supported by Gonulal and Loewen (2018), outlines six main types:

- *Modeling*

Teachers demonstrate tasks and expected outcomes, using examples (e.g., past student work) and modeling appropriate academic language. This helps students understand what success looks like and provides a basis for imitation.

- *Bridging*

New content is linked to students' existing knowledge through techniques such as anticipatory guides. This helps personalize learning, correct misconceptions, and build conceptual connections.

- *Imitating*

Students practice using new vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation through repetition and speaking exercises. Teachers provide feedback and corrections to improve fluency and accuracy.

- *Removing*

As students gain confidence and skills, teachers gradually reduce support, encouraging more independence in completing tasks.

- *Achieving*

Students independently perform tasks and demonstrate language skills through interactive or performative activities such as presentations or role-playing.

Overall, scaffolding helps learners gradually master complex tasks by providing support that is slowly withdrawn. It fosters deeper understanding and independent language use, with teachers adjusting their assistance based on each student's needs.

### 2.6. Previous studies

Previous studies have consistently shown that scaffolding can significantly enhance students' speaking skills, with many grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which highlights the value of guided support in language learning. Research by Khaliliaqdam (2014), Ginaya et al. (2018), and others demonstrated improvements in learners' speaking abilities through techniques such as group discussions, role-plays, and problem-solving. However, despite these positive findings, several limitations are evident. Many studies had small sample sizes, short intervention durations, and were conducted in specific contexts, such as adult learning or single institutions, limiting the generalizability and long-term applicability of their results. Furthermore, most focused solely on speaking skills, overlooking the potential benefits of scaffolding in other language areas such as listening, reading, and writing. Some studies, such as those by Chen and Zhao (2016), provided theoretical insights but offered no practical classroom strategies, while others focused solely on teachers' perspectives, missing valuable insights from learners themselves. These gaps suggest a need for more comprehensive, empirically grounded research that includes diverse learners, explores various language skills, and assesses both teacher and student experiences over an extended period to better understand the full impact of scaffolding in language education.

## III. Research methodology

### 3.1. Research design

This study employs Action Research, a method that bridges theory and classroom practice through systematic inquiry (Nunan, 1989). Following the model by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), the research was conducted over three months (25 lessons), consisting of one cycle with four distinct stages:

**Step 1: Planning:** The researcher identified students' speaking barriers and designed a scaffolding-based intervention. This included selecting targeted vocabulary, grammar structures, and communicative tasks from the *Let's Talk 2* textbook.

**Step 2: Action:** The researcher implemented the scaffolding techniques in the A2-level classroom, providing temporary support (guidance, prompts, and tools) that was gradually reduced as students gained autonomy.

**Step 3: Observation:** During the implementation, data were collected through classroom observations and student responses to assess the effectiveness of the scaffolding in improving lexical resources, grammar, and pronunciation.

**Step 4: Reflection:** After the course, the researcher evaluated the outcomes to determine the intervention's success and identify areas for future pedagogical adjustment.

Due to time constraints and the fixed duration of the language center's curriculum, only one action research cycle was applied. This single cycle, however, provided a focused environment to observe the immediate impact of scaffolding on students' speaking competence.

### 3.2. Participants

The study involved 16 A2-level students (aged 19-22) at a language center in Hanoi. Enrolled in a communication course, these students sought to improve their speaking skills for university graduation requirements, including VSTEP, IELTS, or TOEIC.

The researcher, an M.A. student and part-time teacher at the center, acted as both instructor and observer. In this dual role, she implemented scaffolding techniques and assessed their impact on the students' speaking proficiency throughout the project.

### 3.3. Data collection and instruments

This study employed a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2009) to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of scaffolding on A2-level students' speaking skills. Data collection involved speaking tests (pre- and post-test), questionnaires, and classroom observations, ensuring a reliable integration of quantitative and qualitative findings.

#### 3.3.1. Speaking tests

To evaluate learners' speaking proficiency before and after the intervention, the researcher administered both a pre-test and a post-test. These tests were structured to answer the second research question: *What is the effectiveness of scaffolding-based English speaking instruction on learners' overall proficiency and communication skills?*

##### • Pre-test

The pre-test was conducted at the beginning of the course, before scaffolding techniques were applied. It served as both a placement tool and a baseline for identifying students' initial strengths

and weaknesses. The speaking test was adapted from the A2 Key 2020 sample tests (Cambridge KET for Schools) and consisted of two parts:

- Part 1: Interview (3-4 minutes)
- Part 2: Discussion (5-6 minutes)

##### • Post-test

After 25 lessons incorporating scaffolding techniques, the post-test was administered to evaluate students' progress. The format and rubric were identical to those used in the pre-test, ensuring consistency and comparability. The primary textbook used during the course was *Let's Talk Level 2* (Jones, 2022), chosen for its focus on real-life conversational contexts. Lessons included role plays, discussions, and situational tasks aligned with the course's communicative goals.

#### 3.3.2. Questionnaires

Two questionnaires collected quantitative data on students' challenges and perceptions:

- Pre-questionnaire: Administered after the pre-test to identify difficulties such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and anxiety.

- Post-questionnaire: A 5-item, 5-point Likert scale survey (adapted from Karavas-Doukas, 1996) distributed at the end of the course to assess student attitudes toward scaffolding effectiveness.

#### 3.3.3. Observation

Observation was a key qualitative tool used during the action phase of the research cycle. The researcher employed structured observation checklists over the 25 lessons to assess the degree of student involvement in scaffolded activities.

Observations were rated using a 5-point Likert-type scale:

- 1 - No evidence of participation
- 2 - Superficial or ineffective use
- 3 - Minimal or uncertain involvement
- 4 - Effective application
- 5 - Pervasive or highly effective participation

This data helped determine the level of student engagement and how well the scaffolding strategies were implemented and received.

#### 3.3.4. Procedures for data collection

Over 12 weeks (25 lessons), data were collected in three phases: Week 1 - pre-test and questionnaire; Weeks 2-11 - scaffolding techniques applied using *Let's Talk 2* with observation checklists; Week 12 - post-test and feedback questionnaire to assess speaking improvement and perceptions of scaffolding.

#### 3.3.5. Data analysis

Quantitative data (test scores, questionnaires) were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Observation notes were thematically coded to assess engagement and the impact of scaffolding techniques. The study used a mixed-methods approach to evaluate scaffolding effectiveness:

Quantitative: Pre- and post-test scores were compared via descriptive statistics (means/percentages) to measure proficiency gains. Questionnaires tracked shifts in student attitudes and in the use of strategies.

Qualitative: Observation checklists were thematically coded to assess engagement, with participation levels categorized on a 5-point scale.

This integrated analysis provided a comprehensive view of both learning outcomes and classroom interaction.

## IV. Research results and discussion

### 4.1. Research results

#### 4.1.1. Analyzing the data collected from the tests

To evaluate the extent to which scaffolding techniques enhance students' speaking competence (Research Question 1), pre- and post-tests adapted from the Cambridge A2 Speaking Test were administered. These tests, consisting of an Interview and a Discussion, were used to measure proficiency before and after the 25-lesson intervention. The results below demonstrate significant improvements in mean scores, indicating the effectiveness of scaffolding in developing students' speaking abilities.

Table 1. Mean scores of the pre-test

|                           | Pre-test |      |                    |
|---------------------------|----------|------|--------------------|
|                           | Mean     | Mode | Standard deviation |
| Grammar                   | 2.75     | 3    | 1.1456             |
| Lexical Resource          | 2.25     | 2    | 0.8292             |
| Pronunciation             | 1.3125   | 1    | 0.4635             |
| Interactive communication | 1.25     | 1    | 0.433              |

Although students were expected to be at the A2 level, the pre-test showed wide variation in speaking ability. Most performed poorly, with 12 students scoring below 10/20 and only 4 reaching

the A2-equivalent score (above 10/20). Based on these results (Appendix 6), students were categorized into three groups: weak (below 7), average (7-10), and good (above 10).

Table 2. Post-test mean scores

| Pro-test                  |      |      |                    |
|---------------------------|------|------|--------------------|
|                           | Mean | Mode | Standard Deviation |
| Grammar                   | 3.25 | 2    | 1.183              |
| Lexical Resource          | 2.69 | 2    | 1.014              |
| Pronunciation             | 1.9  | 2    | 0.5                |
| Interactive communication | 2    | 2    | 0.89               |

Based on the post-test findings, both the total scores and the scores for each criterion increased significantly. The number of students categorized as average

rose from 6 to 9. As for the students in the good category, although their total scores did not change, their scores on each criterion increased by 1 to 3 points.

Table 3. A comparison of mean scores between pre-test and post-test total scores

|             | Pre-test | Post-test | Differences |
|-------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| Mean Scores | 7.56     | 9.81      | 2.25        |

The table shows the mean pre- and post-test scores for 16 students who participated in 25 scaffolded English communication lessons over 12 weeks at a private center in Hanoi. Post-test scores ( $M = 9.81$ ) were notably higher than pre-test scores ( $M = 7.56$ ), indicating that scaffolding techniques effectively improved speaking skills. Most students showed clear progress, reflecting the positive impact of scaffolding on both teaching and learning after ten weeks of implementation.

#### 4.1.2. Analyzing the data collected from questionnaires

##### • Pre-questionnaire

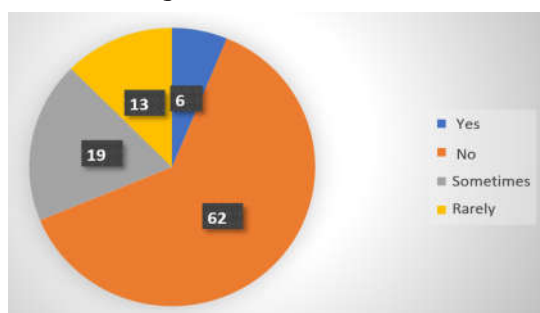


Figure 2. The percentage of students who use English as the main language during their lessons

The four-question pre-questionnaire identified causes of low speaking proficiency

among the 16 students. Administered during the first lesson, their responses enabled the researcher to select appropriate materials and strategically plan the research stages based on identified needs.

This figure illustrates that before being employed, scaffolding the percentage of students who did not use English as the main language during their learning context, accounting for the most part at 62%, while the figure for students who use English frequently during the lessons was at 6%, and more than double the figures for students who sometimes and rarely speak English, mainly during lessons. That is one of the huge impacts on students' fluency.

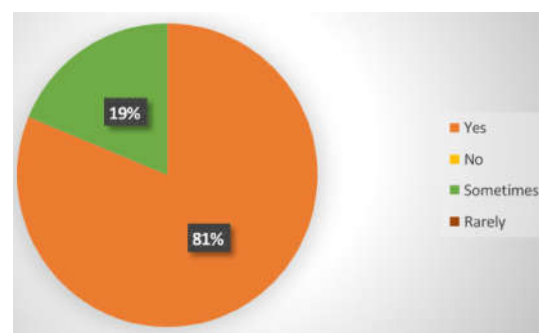


Figure 3. Being afraid of speaking English in front of the class

A major factor affecting students' speaking competence is psychological barriers. Data shows that 81% of students feel anxious about speaking English in front of others, limiting their fluency and confidence. This fear can cause avoidance of oral activities, hindering language development. Addressing

this issue is essential. Scaffolding techniques-such as low-pressure speaking tasks, positive feedback, and a supportive classroom atmosphere-can reduce anxiety and boost confidence. As a result, students become more willing to speak and improve their language proficiency.

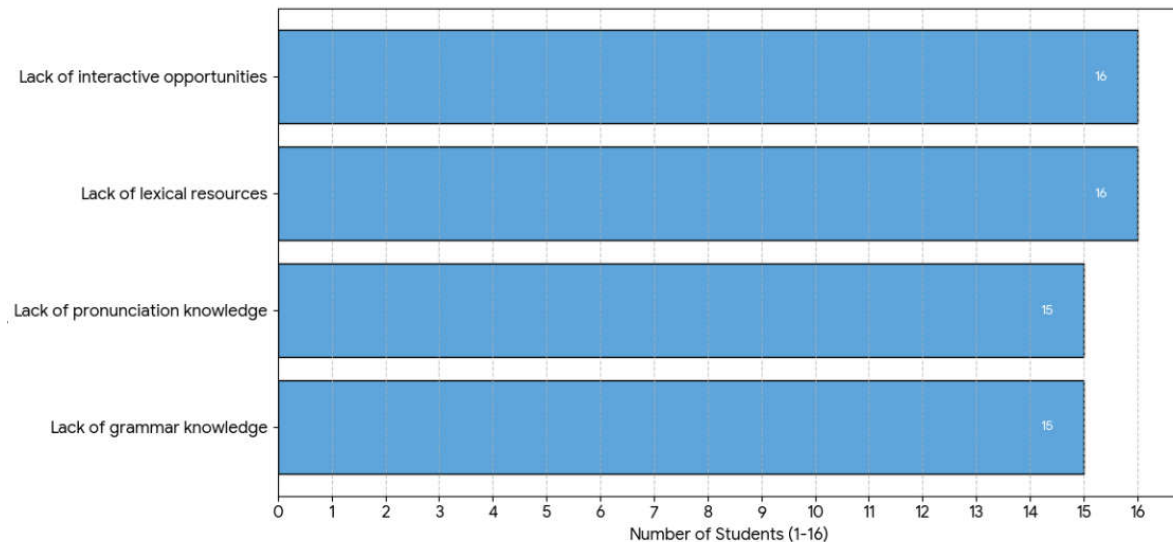


Figure 4. Factors that impact students' English speaking proficiency

The lack of lexical resources, grammar, pronunciation, and interactive opportunities accounted for nearly 100% of the responses students selected when completing the survey. These factors contributed to students' lower confidence and fluency when presenting or communicating, both formally and informally, in English.

The figure shows that 60% of students preferred pair or group work, supporting the effective use of scaffolding techniques. Collaborative learning offers a low-stress setting for practicing speaking, encouraging peer interaction and feedback. According to Wood et al. (1976),

scaffolding involves guided support to help learners do what they can't do on their own. Group work fosters this support, enhancing speaking skills and building learner confidence.

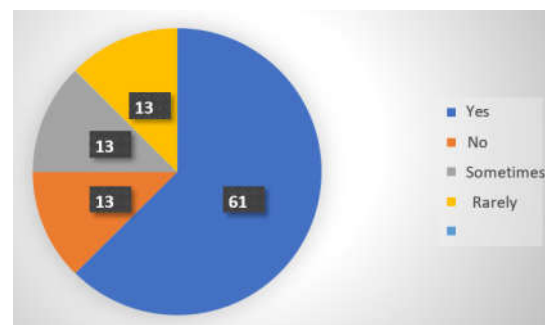


Figure 5. Being interested in working in pairs or in groups when learning speaking skills.

• *Post-questionnaire*

Table 5. Students' attitudes toward the implementation of scaffolding techniques in their English speaking skills

| Items   | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| <b>After attending the course which applied scaffolding techniques as an educational intervention</b> |                   |          |           |       |                |
| Your pronunciation knowledge has improved considerably.   |                   |          | 2         | 4     | 10             |
| You are able to use vocabulary appropriately to communicate in English after the course               |                   |          | 3         | 6     | 7              |
| Your grammar used to express your ideas orally is more effectively.                                   |                   |          | 5         | 5     | 6              |
| You have more confidence in speaking English both in formal and informal conversation.                |                   |          | 2         | 4     | 10             |
| Your interaction and competence in speaking English have improved considerably.                       |                   |          | 1         | 4     | 11             |
| You find out the importance of speaking skills in your second language learning process.              |                   |          |           |       | 16             |
| You are involved in the class activities during lessons which employed scaffolding techniques         |                   |          | 3         | 3     | 10             |
| Scaffolding techniques changed your learning attitude during the lessons of the course.               |                   |          | 3         | 4     | 9              |

Table 5 indicates a highly positive reception of scaffolding. Approximately 63% of students reported gains in pronunciation, confidence, and interaction, while 80% agreed or strongly agreed that they were actively engaged. With only 10% uncertain about their progress, these results suggest that the techniques were both effectively implemented and well received, successfully enhancing both linguistic skills and classroom participation.

4.1.3. *Observation findings*

Classroom observations and test results confirmed scaffolding's positive impact. According to the checklist (Appendix 12), 100% of students actively participated: 69% demonstrated highly effective engagement, and 31% demonstrated effective participation.

These high engagement levels suggest that scaffolding techniques successfully fostered student involvement and enhanced speaking skill development throughout the intervention.

- Effective application (31 %):

5 students actively engaged with the learning material, demonstrating clear understanding through thoughtful contributions during discussions and activities.

- Pervasive or Highly Effective Participation (69 %):

Analysis showed high engagement: 11 students (69%) consistently initiated discussions and demonstrated leadership, while the remaining 5 (31%) actively participated through critical thinking. The absence of passive involvement

indicates that the instructional strategies successfully fostered a dynamic, inclusive, and collaborative learning environment. These findings suggest that the current approach is highly effective in promoting active student enthusiasm.

#### 4.2. Discussions

The results confirm that scaffolding significantly enhances A2 students' speaking competence, with the mean score rising from 7.56 to 9.81. This validates the initial hypothesis that structured, temporary support effectively facilitates learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

##### Interpretation and Comparison

The improvement in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation suggests that techniques like visual aids and guided practice reduced cognitive load, allowing students to focus on fluency. These findings align with those of Wood et al. (1976) and Goh and Burns (2012), demonstrating that scaffolding is essential for integrating complex speaking components. Notably, increased student confidence mirrors Verenikina's (2003) findings that scaffolding fosters both cognitive and emotional growth.

##### Contributions and Limitations

This study provides a practical framework for scaffolding in private language centers. However, a primary limitation was the single-cycle duration due to time constraints. While immediate gains were evident, a multi-cycle approach would better assess long-term skill retention without teacher intervention.

##### Future Research

Future studies should explore peer scaffolding to determine whether student-to-student support yields similar motivational benefits at the A2 level.

## V. Conclusion and recommendation

This study shows that scaffolding techniques effectively enhance A2-level learners' speaking skills in EFL settings. Structured support-like modeling, guided practice, and feedback-boosts students' confidence and engagement. The findings suggest that teachers should integrate scaffolding into lessons, despite challenges like large classes or limited time. Professional development can help teachers apply these strategies effectively. For policymakers, the study highlights the need to prioritize speaking skills in curricula and assessments. Overall, scaffolding is a practical, impactful method to improve oral communication in language classrooms.

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# ÁP DỤNG KỸ THUẬT SCAFFOLDING TRONG VIỆC CẢI THIỆN KỸ NĂNG NÓI TRÌNH ĐỘ A2 CỦA HỌC VIÊN TẠI MỘT TRUNG TÂM TIẾNG ANH Ở HÀ NỘI: MỘT NGHIÊN CỨU HÀNH ĐỘNG

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**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này đánh giá hiệu quả của kỹ thuật scaffolding trong việc cải thiện kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh và thái độ học tập của học viên trình độ A2. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện tại một trung tâm tiếng Anh tư nhân ở Hà Nội, với 16 học viên tham gia khóa giao tiếp kéo dài 12 tuần. Phương pháp nghiên cứu hỗn hợp được áp dụng, bao gồm kiểm tra đầu/cuối khóa, khảo sát và quan sát lớp học. Kết quả cho thấy kỹ năng ngữ pháp, từ vựng, phát âm và tương tác được cải thiện rõ rệt. Học viên cũng thể hiện sự tự tin, hứng thú và tham gia tích cực hơn. Các kỹ thuật như luyện tập có hướng dẫn, phản hồi và làm việc nhóm tỏ ra phù hợp với nhu cầu người học. Nghiên cứu đề xuất áp dụng scaffolding cho cả các kỹ năng ngôn ngữ khác, không chỉ riêng kỹ năng nói.

**Từ khóa:** cấp độ A2, thái độ, kỹ thuật scaffolding, kỹ năng nói, phương pháp kết hợp

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