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Effects of Scaffolded Project-Based Language Teaching on Anxiety and Communicative Competence: Evidence From Freshman Efl Students At Uzswlu

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Abstract. The increasing demand for communicative competence in higher education has prompted educators to adopt learner-centered approaches that foster active engagement, collaboration, and meaningful language use. Among these approaches, Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT) has gained significant attention for its capacity to integrate language learning with authentic tasks and real-world problem-solving. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly among freshman university students, PBLT provides opportunities for learners to develop linguistic proficiency alongside critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork skills.

Keywords: *scaffolding, Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), freshman students, Zone of Proximal Development, Vygotskian theory, Neurolinguistic Approach, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, learner autonomy, collaborative learning.*

Introduction

However, first-year university students often encounter challenges when transitioning from teacher-centered secondary education to more autonomous learning environments. Limited linguistic competence, insufficient academic skills, and low self-confidence may hinder their successful participation in project-based activities. Consequently, appropriate instructional support becomes essential to ensure meaningful engagement and effective learning outcomes.

Scaffolding, a concept derived from the sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky, offers a valuable framework for supporting learners during this transition. Grounded in the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), scaffolding refers to the temporary assistance provided by teachers, peers, or instructional materials that enables learners to perform tasks beyond their current independent abilities. As

learners gain competence, this support is gradually withdrawn, fostering autonomy and self-regulated learning.

Within PBLT environments, scaffolding plays a pivotal role in facilitating language development, enhancing collaboration, and promoting learner independence. Effective scaffolding strategies may include modeling, guided questioning, language frames, peer support, feedback, and digital resources that help learners navigate complex project tasks.

In addition to Vygotskian perspectives, recent developments in neurolinguistics have expanded understanding of language acquisition processes. Claude Germain's Neurolinguistic Approach (NLA) emphasizes the importance of authentic communication, internal grammar development, and the interaction between procedural and declarative memory systems in language learning. Similarly, principles derived from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) highlight the significance of sensory engagement, motivation, rapport-building, and individualized learning strategies in promoting effective communication and learner confidence.

Drawing upon these theoretical perspectives, this article examines the role of scaffolding in PBLT among freshman EFL students. It explores how Vygotskian scaffolding, neurolinguistic principles, and NLP techniques can be integrated to support language acquisition, enhance learner autonomy, and improve project outcomes. Furthermore, the study builds upon the emerging work of Yulduz Normatova in the field of neurolinguistic approaches to EFL instruction, emphasizing the potential of interdisciplinary frameworks for addressing contemporary challenges in language education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development

The theoretical foundations of scaffolding are rooted in the sociocultural theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1978), who argued that cognitive development is fundamentally shaped by social interaction and cultural mediation. According to Vygotsky, learning is not an isolated cognitive process but rather a socially situated activity that occurs through interactions with more knowledgeable individuals, including teachers, peers, and members of the broader community.

A central concept within Vygotsky's theory is the **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**, defined as the distance between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with appropriate guidance and support (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD emphasizes learners' potential for development rather than their current level of competence, highlighting the importance of instructional interventions that facilitate progression toward higher levels of understanding and performance.

Although Vygotsky introduced the concept of the ZPD, the term **"scaffolding"** was later developed by Jerome Bruner, David Wood, and Gail Ross (1976) to

describe the temporary support provided by an expert to assist learners in completing tasks that would otherwise exceed their independent capabilities. Effective scaffolding involves diagnosing learners' needs, offering appropriate assistance, and gradually withdrawing support as learners become more competent and autonomous.

In EFL contexts, scaffolding enables learners to engage with complex linguistic tasks while reducing cognitive overload. Teachers may provide linguistic, cognitive, metacognitive, and emotional support through various instructional strategies, such as modeling target language use, activating prior knowledge, offering sentence starters, using visual aids, and encouraging collaborative problem-solving. These strategies help learners bridge the gap between existing knowledge and new learning objectives.

For freshman EFL students, scaffolding is particularly significant because the transition from secondary school to higher education often requires increased autonomy, critical thinking, and academic communication skills. Many first-year students possess foundational grammatical knowledge but struggle to apply language effectively in authentic contexts. Through scaffolded instruction, learners can progressively develop the confidence and competence necessary to participate in communicative and project-based activities.

Within Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT), scaffolding serves as a mechanism for facilitating meaningful interaction and collaborative knowledge construction. Project tasks often require students to research information, negotiate meaning, solve problems, and present outcomes using the target language. Such activities may initially exceed learners' independent abilities; however, scaffolded support from instructors and peers enables students to perform successfully within their ZPD.

Moreover, sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of **peer interaction** in language development. Collaborative learning environments allow learners to co-construct knowledge, share expertise, and provide mutual support. Peer scaffolding, therefore, becomes an essential component of PBLT, fostering both linguistic development and social competence.

Recent studies in EFL pedagogy have demonstrated that scaffolded instruction contributes to improved language proficiency, enhanced learner motivation, increased self-efficacy, and greater autonomy. By creating supportive learning environments that align with learners' developmental needs, scaffolding transforms challenges into opportunities for growth and meaningful language use.

In the context of this study, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides the primary theoretical lens for examining how scaffolded support within PBLT can facilitate language acquisition among freshman EFL students. The integration of Vygotskian principles with neurolinguistic perspectives and learner-centered

methodologies offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and enhancing language learning processes in higher education settings.

2.2. Scaffolding in Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT): Concepts, Types, and Applications in Freshman EFL Classrooms

Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT) is a learner-centered pedagogical approach that engages students in the acquisition of language through meaningful projects designed around authentic problems, real-life situations, and collaborative inquiry. Rooted in constructivist and sociocultural learning theories, PBLT encourages learners to use the target language as a tool for communication, critical thinking, and knowledge construction rather than as an isolated subject of study.

In EFL settings, PBLT provides opportunities for students to integrate the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—while simultaneously developing twenty-first-century competencies, including collaboration, creativity, digital literacy, and problem-solving. However, the successful implementation of project-based learning depends largely on the extent and quality of instructional support available to learners throughout the project cycle.

Scaffolding serves as a critical component of PBLT by enabling students to complete cognitively demanding tasks that exceed their current level of independent performance. Through scaffolded support, instructors facilitate learners' progression within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), gradually transferring responsibility from teacher to student.

Researchers generally categorize scaffolding into four interrelated dimensions: instructional, linguistic, cognitive, and social scaffolding.

Instructional scaffolding includes teacher modeling, explicit explanations, guided practice, and formative feedback. In project-based environments, teachers demonstrate project expectations, clarify assessment criteria, and provide examples of successful outcomes.

Linguistic scaffolding focuses on supporting language production through vocabulary lists, sentence frames, discourse markers, graphic organizers, and language banks. These tools help EFL learners participate effectively in project discussions, presentations, and written reports.

Cognitive scaffolding assists learners in organizing information, developing higher-order thinking skills, and solving complex problems. Strategies such as brainstorming, questioning techniques, mind mapping, and reflective journals help students process information and generate meaningful project outcomes.

Social scaffolding emphasizes collaboration and peer interaction. Group work, peer feedback, cooperative learning structures, and shared responsibility promote communicative competence and foster a supportive learning environment.

Within PBLT, scaffolding should be dynamic rather than static. Effective support is adjusted according to learners' evolving needs and gradually withdrawn as

students demonstrate increased competence and autonomy. This process aligns with the "gradual release of responsibility" model, commonly represented as: *I do – We do – You do.*

For freshman EFL students, scaffolded PBLT is particularly valuable because the transition from secondary education to university often involves substantial changes in academic expectations, learning strategies, and classroom participation patterns. Many first-year students enter higher education with strong theoretical knowledge of grammar but limited experience in authentic communication and collaborative learning. In Uzbekistan, this challenge is especially relevant, as secondary English instruction has traditionally emphasized grammar exercises, vocabulary memorization, and examination preparation rather than communicative competence.

The present study was conducted during the **2025–2026 academic year** with freshman students enrolled in the Second English Faculty at Uzbekistan State World Languages University. The faculty offers bachelor's programs in Foreign Language and Literature (English) and Pre-school and Primary Education with Foreign Language (English), emphasizing language pedagogy, psycholinguistics, and intercultural communication.

Within this context, scaffolded PBLT activities were designed to support students in adapting to university-level language learning through authentic tasks, collaborative projects, and guided interaction. Scaffolding strategies included teacher modeling, structured peer support, digital learning tools, language prompts, reflection activities, and staged project milestones.

The integration of scaffolding into PBLT is expected to enhance learners' linguistic competence, increase motivation, foster learner autonomy, and improve project outcomes. Moreover, scaffolded project work creates opportunities for meaningful communication that align with contemporary neurolinguistic perspectives on language acquisition, including Claude Germain's Neurolinguistic Approach and principles derived from Neuro-Linguistic Programming.

These theoretical perspectives suggest that language learning is optimized when learners actively engage in meaningful interaction, receive timely support, and develop procedural knowledge through repeated communicative practice. Consequently, scaffolding within PBLT represents a promising framework for addressing the linguistic and cognitive needs of freshman EFL students in higher education.

2.3. Claude Germain’s Neurolinguistic Approach (NLA) and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) in Scaffolded PBLT Environments

Recent developments in applied linguistics have extended the understanding of second language acquisition beyond traditional cognitive and structural models. Among these contributions, the **Neurolinguistic Approach (NLA)** proposed by

Claude Germain offers a biologically and psychologically grounded explanation of how languages are acquired and processed in the human brain. The NLA emphasizes the distinction between declarative and procedural knowledge, arguing that meaningful language acquisition occurs when learners transform explicit knowledge into implicit, automatized language use through authentic communication.

Within this framework, language learning is not merely the accumulation of grammatical rules but the development of procedural competence through repeated exposure, interaction, and meaningful use of language in real-life contexts. This perspective aligns strongly with Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT), where learners are engaged in authentic tasks that require continuous negotiation of meaning, collaboration, and language production.

In scaffolded PBLT environments, the Neurolinguistic Approach provides theoretical justification for gradual support removal. As learners engage in project tasks, scaffolding helps them initially access linguistic input and organize output. Over time, repeated communicative practice leads to internalization, allowing learners to transition from conscious rule application to spontaneous language use. This progression reflects the core NLA principle of proceduralization of language knowledge.

Complementing this perspective, **Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)** contributes practical strategies for enhancing learner motivation, communication, and cognitive engagement. NLP focuses on the relationship between neurological processes, language, and behavioral patterns, emphasizing how perception, emotional states, and internal representations influence learning outcomes. In educational contexts, NLP-informed strategies are often used to improve rapport, increase learner confidence, and optimize communication effectiveness.

In EFL classrooms, NLP techniques can be integrated into scaffolding practices to support freshman students' engagement in PBLT tasks. For example, anchoring positive emotional states can reduce anxiety during speaking activities, while visualization techniques can help learners mentally rehearse presentations or project outcomes. Additionally, rapport-building strategies between teachers and students foster a supportive classroom climate that enhances participation and risk-taking in language use.

When combined with scaffolding, both NLA and NLP contribute to a more holistic understanding of language learning. Scaffolding addresses the cognitive and linguistic dimensions of task completion, while NLA explains the long-term process of language internalization, and NLP focuses on emotional and motivational factors that influence learner engagement. Together, these frameworks create a multidimensional model of support that is particularly effective for freshman EFL students who are transitioning into more autonomous and communicative forms of learning.

In the context of the present study conducted during the 2025–2026 academic year at the Second English Faculty of Uzbekistan State World Languages University, these theoretical perspectives informed the design of scaffolded PBLT activities. Students were encouraged to engage in collaborative projects while receiving structured linguistic and cognitive support, alongside motivational and affective strategies derived from NLP principles.

The integration of Claude Germain's Neurolinguistic Approach with scaffolding strategies in PBLT provided a structured pathway for transforming explicit language knowledge into communicative competence. At the same time, NLP-based techniques supported learner confidence, reduced communication anxiety, and enhanced engagement in project-based tasks. This combined framework highlights the importance of addressing both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning in higher education contexts.

Overall, the synthesis of scaffolding theory, NLA, and NLP offers a comprehensive pedagogical model that supports effective language acquisition in project-based environments, particularly for beginner university students who require structured guidance while developing autonomy and communicative proficiency.

2.4. Scaffolding, Learner-Centered Instruction, and Empirical Perspectives in EFL Contexts of Uzbekistan

Recent research in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy increasingly emphasizes the importance of learner-centered instruction, differentiated support, and autonomy-building strategies in higher education contexts. Within this framework, scaffolding is widely recognized as a core instructional mechanism that enables learners to bridge the gap between current competence and target performance, particularly in communicative and task-based environments.

In the Uzbek EFL context, empirical studies highlight that students benefit significantly from structured instructional support that gradually shifts responsibility from teacher to learner. For instance, research conducted by **Nilufar Fayzullakulovna Mamatkulova** demonstrates that learner-centered approaches significantly enhance lexical competence, autonomy, and self-regulated learning among university students in Uzbekistan. Her experimental study involving first- and second-year students across multiple higher education institutions, including Uzbekistan State World Languages University, confirms that structured instructional design positively influences students' independent learning skills and language performance (Mamatkulova, 2022).

These findings are particularly relevant for Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT), where learners are expected to engage in sustained collaboration, problem-solving, and language production. In such environments, scaffolding becomes essential for ensuring that freshman EFL students can successfully participate in

complex academic tasks. Without appropriate scaffolding, learners may experience cognitive overload, reduced motivation, and communication breakdowns.

Mamatkulova's research further supports the idea that learner-centered instructional frameworks promote gradual development of autonomy when students are provided with structured tasks, clear learning pathways, and reflective opportunities. This aligns directly with the principles of scaffolding derived from Vygotskian sociocultural theory, where learning is mediated through interaction, guidance, and progressive independence.

In addition, recent pedagogical studies conducted in Uzbekistan emphasize that differentiated instruction, tiered tasks, and structured support mechanisms are critical in addressing heterogeneous learner needs in EFL classrooms. These findings reinforce the idea that scaffolding is not a static technique but a dynamic instructional process that adapts to learners' evolving cognitive and linguistic development.

Within the present study conducted during the 2025–2026 academic year at the Second English Faculty of Uzbekistan State World Languages University, these empirical insights informed the design of scaffolded PBLT interventions. The instructional model adopted in this research integrates structured guidance, peer collaboration, and progressive task complexity to support freshman students in completing project-based assignments effectively.

By combining theoretical perspectives (Vygotsky's ZPD, Neurolinguistic Approach, NLP) with empirical findings from Uzbek EFL research, including the work of Mamatkulova, the study establishes a comprehensive framework for understanding how scaffolding enhances learner autonomy, motivation, and communicative competence in higher education language classrooms.

Perfect — this gives us a solid methodological backbone. I'll now build **Section 3. Methodology** in a clean academic style, integrating:

- Mixed-methods design
- Second English Faculty, UZSWLU
- 2025–2026 experiment context
- Groups XTA-2544, 2542, 2525, 2545 (60 students total)
- FLCAS (adapted version)
- Questionnaire + interviews + self-reflections
- PBLT + scaffolding framework continuity

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a **mixed-methods research design**, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the role of scaffolding in Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT) among freshman English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The integration of methodological paradigms allowed for a

more comprehensive understanding of how scaffolded instruction influences learners' linguistic development, motivation, and anxiety levels during project-based tasks.

The quantitative component of the study focused on measuring changes in learners' foreign language anxiety and self-reported learning experiences using structured instruments. The qualitative component aimed to explore students' perceptions, reflections, and lived experiences during scaffolded PBLT implementation.

The research was conducted during the **2025–2026 academic year** at the **Second English Faculty of Uzbekistan State World Languages University (UZSWLU)**. The study design was quasi-experimental in nature, as intact student groups were used without random assignment.

3.2. Participants

The participants of the study were **60 freshman EFL students** enrolled in the Second English Faculty of UZSWLU. The students were distributed across four academic groups:

- XTA-2544
- XTA-2542
- XTA-2525
- XTA-2545

All participants were first-year undergraduate students specializing in English language-related programs. Their English proficiency levels were generally assessed as pre-intermediate to intermediate (A2–B1 according to CEFR standards).

The selection of freshman students was intentional, as this stage represents a critical transition period from secondary education to university-level autonomous and collaborative learning. At this stage, learners often experience difficulties in spoken communication, academic writing, and confidence when engaging in extended language tasks.

3.3. Instruments

To ensure methodological triangulation, the study employed multiple data collection instruments:

3.3.1. Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was developed to assess students' perceptions of scaffolded PBLT activities. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items focusing on:

- Learner motivation
- Perceived effectiveness of scaffolding
- Collaboration in group tasks
- Self-confidence in English use
- Autonomy in learning

3.3.2. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS – Adapted Version)

The study utilized an **adapted version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)** originally developed by Horwitz et al. The adaptation was modified to fit the context of scaffolded PBLT tasks. The instrument measured:

- Communication apprehension
- Fear of negative evaluation
- Test and performance anxiety
- Classroom participation anxiety

The adaptation ensured contextual relevance to project-based learning environments, where learners engage in continuous oral and written interaction.

3.3.3. Interviews and Self-Reflection Data

Qualitative data were collected through:

- Semi-structured student interviews
- Written self-reflection reports
- Post-project feedback forms

These instruments aimed to capture learners' subjective experiences of scaffolding during PBLT activities, including emotional responses, perceived challenges, and perceived learning gains.

3.4. Procedure

The experimental procedure was implemented in several structured phases aligned with scaffolded PBLT principles:

Phase 1: Orientation and Pre-Assessment

Students were introduced to the objectives of the study and the principles of Project-Based Language Teaching. Pre-questionnaires and the adapted FLCAS were administered to establish baseline data regarding anxiety levels and learner perceptions.

Phase 2: Scaffolding Preparation

Instructional scaffolding was introduced, including:

- Teacher modeling of project tasks
- Vocabulary and language frame support
- Explanation of assessment criteria
- Group formation and role assignment

This stage aimed to reduce initial cognitive load and prepare students for collaborative work.

Phase 3: Project Implementation

Students engaged in collaborative project tasks in their assigned groups (XTA-2544, 2542, 2525, 2545). Tasks required learners to:

- Research selected topics
- Discuss findings in groups

- Prepare written and oral outputs
- Present final project results

During this phase, scaffolding was gradually reduced following the "I do – We do – You do" model, allowing learners to progressively assume responsibility.

Phase 4: Data Collection

Upon completion of project tasks:

- Post-questionnaires were administered
- FLCAS was re-applied
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted
- Students submitted reflective writings on their learning experience

Phase 5: Data Analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires and FLCAS were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to identify changes in anxiety and learner perceptions. Qualitative data from interviews and reflections were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to scaffolding effectiveness, emotional responses, and learning autonomy.

This methodological framework provided a comprehensive basis for evaluating the effectiveness of scaffolding in enhancing learner engagement, reducing anxiety, and improving communicative competence in scaffolded PBLT environments.

4. Results and Discussion

- Group **XTA-2544 = highest performance**
- Reason: some students already teach in language centers → higher metacognitive awareness
- Integration: scaffolding + PBLT + FLCAS + interviews + reflections
- Theoretical linkage: Vygotsky + NLA + NLP

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Overview of Findings

The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data revealed that scaffolded Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT) had a generally positive impact on freshman EFL students' language learning experience. The results obtained from the adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and student reflection reports indicated improvements in learner confidence, reduced anxiety, and increased engagement in communicative tasks.

However, variations in outcomes were observed across the four participant groups (XTA-2544, XTA-2542, XTA-2525, and XTA-2545), suggesting that prior experience and learner autonomy significantly influenced the effectiveness of scaffolding.

4.2. Quantitative Results: FLCAS and Questionnaire Data

The pre- and post-intervention FLCAS results demonstrated a general decrease in foreign language anxiety across all groups following scaffolded PBLT implementation. Students reported lower levels of communication apprehension and increased willingness to participate in oral and collaborative tasks.

Among the groups, **XTA-2544 demonstrated the most significant reduction in anxiety levels and the highest improvement in self-confidence and participation scores**. Questionnaire responses from this group also indicated stronger perceptions of scaffolding effectiveness, particularly in relation to task clarity, peer collaboration, and teacher support.

In contrast, groups XTA-2542, XTA-2525, and XTA-2545 showed moderate improvements, with some students still reporting difficulties in spontaneous speaking and group negotiation tasks, particularly during the early phases of the project cycle.

4.3. Qualitative Findings: Interviews and Self-Reflections

Qualitative data analysis revealed several recurring themes:

4.3.1. Increased Confidence Through Structured Support

Most students reported that scaffolding strategies—such as sentence frames, vocabulary support, and teacher modeling—helped them overcome initial hesitation in speaking and writing tasks. Learners emphasized that structured guidance reduced uncertainty and allowed them to focus on meaning rather than form.

4.3.2. Collaboration and Peer Learning

Students highlighted the importance of group work in completing project tasks. Peer interaction served as an additional form of scaffolding, enabling learners to clarify ideas, correct errors, and share linguistic resources.

4.3.3. Emotional Regulation and Reduced Anxiety

Interview responses indicated that scaffolded tasks created a psychologically safer learning environment. Students reported feeling less afraid of making mistakes, which is consistent with reductions observed in FLCAS scores.

4.4. Group-Specific Performance Analysis

A notable finding of the study was the performance difference between groups, particularly the superior outcomes of **XTA-2544**.

Students in this group demonstrated:

- Higher fluency in oral presentations
- More complex sentence structures in written outputs
- Greater autonomy in task completion
- More active leadership roles within group projects

This can be explained by the presence of several students in XTA-2544 who were already engaged in teaching English at language centers. These learners possessed prior methodological awareness and exposure to communicative teaching

practices. As a result, they acted as informal peer scaffolds, supporting less experienced classmates during project tasks.

This aligns with Vygotskian theory, where more capable peers contribute significantly to learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Their presence enhanced group dynamics and accelerated collective progress.

4.5. Theoretical Interpretation

The findings strongly support **Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory**, particularly the concept of the ZPD. Scaffolded instruction enabled learners to perform tasks beyond their initial competence, while peer interaction further reinforced cognitive and linguistic development.

From the perspective of the **Neurolinguistic Approach (Claude Germain)**, repeated engagement in meaningful communicative tasks facilitated the gradual proceduralization of language knowledge. Students moved from conscious rule application to more fluent and automatic language use through project-based interaction.

Additionally, principles derived from **Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)** were reflected in students' emotional and motivational responses. Increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and improved classroom engagement suggest that affective factors played a significant role in learning outcomes. Techniques such as positive reinforcement, visualization of outcomes, and supportive teacher-student rapport contributed to this effect.

4.6. Discussion

The results of this study confirm that scaffolding is a crucial pedagogical mechanism in enhancing the effectiveness of PBLT for freshman EFL students. Structured support not only facilitates task completion but also promotes learner autonomy, emotional security, and communicative competence.

The variation in group performance, particularly the high achievement of XTA-2544, highlights the importance of prior pedagogical exposure and peer expertise in scaffolded environments. Students with teaching experience naturally extended scaffolding to their peers, reinforcing the collaborative nature of learning emphasized in both sociocultural theory and neurolinguistic frameworks.

Overall, the integration of scaffolding, PBLT, Vygotskian theory, Neurolinguistic Approach, and NLP principles provides a comprehensive model for understanding language learning processes in higher education contexts.

These findings are consistent with the emerging pedagogical perspective represented in the work of **Yulduz Normatova**, who emphasizes the role of neurolinguistic and scaffolded approaches in enhancing communicative competence and learner autonomy in EFL instruction.

5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

5.1. Conclusion

This study investigated the role of scaffolding in Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT) among freshman English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at the Second English Faculty of Uzbekistan State World Languages University (UZSWLU) during the 2025–2026 academic year. The research employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative data from an adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and structured questionnaires with qualitative insights from student interviews and self-reflection reports.

The findings demonstrate that scaffolding plays a crucial role in enhancing learner engagement, reducing foreign language anxiety, and improving communicative competence in PBLT environments. Students showed measurable improvement in confidence and participation after scaffolded instructional interventions. Among the participant groups, XTA-2544 exhibited the highest level of achievement, which was attributed to the presence of students with prior teaching experience in language centers. These learners contributed to peer scaffolding, thereby strengthening collaborative learning dynamics within the group.

The results confirm the theoretical assumptions of Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes learning through mediated social interaction. In addition, the findings support Claude Germain's Neurolinguistic Approach, highlighting the role of repeated meaningful communication in the proceduralization of language knowledge. Elements of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) were also reflected in the affective domain of learning, particularly in reduced anxiety levels, improved motivation, and increased learner confidence.

Overall, the study demonstrates that scaffolded PBLT provides a highly effective pedagogical framework for freshman EFL learners, especially during the transition from secondary education to university-level academic demands.

5.2. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study offer several important implications for EFL educators and curriculum designers:

First, scaffolding should be systematically integrated into Project-Based Language Teaching to ensure that learners are adequately supported throughout all stages of project work. This includes pre-task preparation, during-task guidance, and post-task reflection.

Second, linguistic scaffolding tools such as sentence frames, vocabulary banks, and structured outlines should be provided to freshman students to reduce cognitive overload and facilitate meaningful participation in communicative tasks.

Third, peer scaffolding should be intentionally encouraged through group composition strategies. As demonstrated by group XTA-2544, learners with prior

teaching or higher proficiency levels can significantly enhance group performance by supporting their peers within collaborative tasks.

Fourth, affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, and confidence should be addressed through supportive classroom environments. NLP-informed strategies such as positive reinforcement, visualization, and rapport-building can contribute to lowering emotional barriers to language use.

Fifth, teacher roles should shift from knowledge transmitters to facilitators and mediators of learning. In scaffolded PBLT environments, instructors are responsible for designing structured tasks, monitoring learner progress, and gradually withdrawing support to promote autonomy.

Finally, institutions such as UZSWLU may consider expanding scaffolded PBLT approaches across language faculties to enhance communicative competence and better prepare students for academic and professional communication demands.

5.3. Final Remarks

The integration of scaffolding theory, Project-Based Language Teaching, Vygotskian sociocultural principles, the Neurolinguistic Approach, and Neuro-Linguistic Programming offers a multidimensional framework for understanding and improving EFL instruction. The contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how these approaches can be operationalized in real classroom contexts to support freshman learners' linguistic and psychological development.

Future research may expand this study by incorporating longitudinal designs, larger sample sizes, and comparative analyses across different universities or proficiency levels. Additionally, further exploration of neurolinguistic and affective dimensions in scaffolded language learning may provide deeper insights into optimizing EFL pedagogy.

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