IMPACT OF ONLINE INSTRUCTOR SCAFFOLDING STRATEGIES ON STUDENTS' SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Students need to master oral communication skills during their university studies to prepare them for future working environment. However, many ESL students are facing difficulties communicating in English because they seldom use English for interaction outside their English classes. Additionally, they lack proper guidance from instructors on how to improve their speaking skills. Thus, this study aims to identify the types, usefulness, and impact of Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies on students' speaking performance. A mixed-method research design was utilised in this study. The instruments used in data collection included an open-ended questionnaire designed by the researchers, pre-test and post-test, recorded videos of students' role-play, and instructor's online feedback. The participants were 66 mixed-proficiency level students from a university in Malaysia. The findings revealed various useful online instructor scaffolding strategies enhanced students' speaking performance. Post-test results showed that the Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies have an impact on students' speaking performance. The findings from this study are meaningful as Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies can benefit students of all proficiency levels to improve their speaking performance.

INTRODUCTION

Students need to master oral communication skills during their university studies to prepare them for future working environment. Speaking is an important language skill to enhance learners' communication. The basic challenge for instructors is to develop English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' speaking skills because the main goal is to produce confident and independent learners with communicative ability in English. Unfortunately, studies found that students were stressed during face-to-face classroom communication in English due to a lack of confidence and nervousness (Hashemi, 2011; Sim et al., 2020a; Tridinanti, 2018) as well as during online interaction due to a lack of English proficiency (Asnadia & Nur Atikah, 2018; Sim et al., 2020b).

Many ESL students are facing difficulty communicating in English because they seldom use English for interaction outside their English class. Thus, with limited practice in the target language, they encountered difficulties in searching for the correct expressions to sustain real-life conversations. Additionally, they lack proper guidance from instructors on how to improve their speaking skills. As a result, coupled with radical progress in the highly sophisticated world of technology, instructors need to find a solution to tackle this situation to produce graduates who are communicatively competent in English to meet the demands of the future labour market. By producing graduates with good speaking skills will help to sustain the development of quality skilled human capital in the future which is in line with the Social Development Goal policy (Khairin, 2021). With this concern, the present study emphasised the importance of Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) in improving students' speaking performance.

Generally, scaffolding teaching and learning via the traditional method of face-to-face classroom interaction has been studied by many scholars with much emphasis on instructional scaffolding in the teaching of reading and

writing (Ali Rahimi, & Nahid Ghanbari, 2011; Charanjit Kaur et al., 2020). Learning speaking skills via face-to-face classroom interaction is difficult for ESL learners but enhancing speaking skills via the virtual platform is a new challenge. Cho and Cho (2016) developed a scale of online instructors' use of scaffolding strategies to enhance communication. A study done by Atikah and Ruwaidah (2022) revealed that Google Meet was a popular online platform preferred by students for teaching and learning as well as to obtain immediate responses. However, rarely explored is an in-depth analysis of qualitative data on students' perceptions of the usefulness and effectiveness of online instructor scaffolding of Malaysian ESL students to improve their speaking performance, which is the central focus of this study.

This study is anchored in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. According to this theory, "learning occurs when simple innate mental activities are transformed into higher-order, more complex mental functions" (Saville-Troike, 2012, p. 119). Vygotsky's concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) postulates "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) as an essential element in the learning process. Drawing on the concept of ZPD, scaffolding is the temporary support provided by the more skillful and experienced individuals to less skillful learners. Once the learner has acquired the knowledge, he would be able to perform independently. In this study, the instructor provided the appropriate scaffolding to students to facilitate their interaction via an online platform.

Thus, this study aimed to identify the useful types of online instructor scaffolding strategies to improve students' speaking performance. It also aimed to determine the usefulness of Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) in enhancing students' speaking performance, and examine the impact of Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) on students' speaking performance.

This study addressed the following research questions:
1) What are the useful types of online instructor scaffolding strategies to improve students' speaking performance?
2) In what ways are the Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS)

useful in enhancing students' speaking performance?

3) What is the impact of the Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) on students' speaking performance?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory of scaffolding was founded by Bruner in 1976 (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). It is the support provided by instructors to learners, and it will be lifted when the learners have acquired the knowledge and skills to perform on their own.

Previous studies disclosed that instructor scaffolding strategies are useful in teaching speaking. Most past studies examined the effects of instructor scaffolding strategies in normal face-face interaction in the classroom while the effects of instructor online scaffolding strategies were rarely studied.

Findings in past studies by Sari and Rozimela (2021) and Seyedeh Zahra and Behzad Rahbar (2016) revealed that the teacher scaffolding strategies which helped students to be independent learners were establishing a common goal, providing explanation, providing clues, modelling, providing clarification, encouraging students' involvement, oral prompt, giving comments and drillings. Besides that, experimental studies by Abdelshaheed (2019) and Khalid (2019) found that instructional scaffolding strategies are effective in promoting oral productive language skills. The students in Khalid's (2019) study perceived that those scaffolding strategies increased their confidence to participate in English conversation.

In another study, Suhartatik and Penggabean (2017) discovered that inviting student engagement was the major teacher scaffolding among other kinds of scaffolding used such as modelling, reviewing, explaining, using questions, clarifying, increasing students' comprehension and reinforcing. However, Basco, Nicke and Kim's (2019) study revealed that students gave the highest rating for instructor scaffolding and the lowest rating that speaking activity increased their confidence in speaking.

Additionally, Ginaya, Aryana, & Somawati's (2018) study found

positive effects of the scaffolding technique in communicative activities and practices as well as increasing students' engagement in active learning. Other than that, Naibaho's (2019) study discovered that the scaffolding method increased students' confidence, and their conversations became smoother.

In light of the findings from the above past studies which examined the effects of instructor scaffolding in traditional face-to-face classroom interaction, the present study focused on a different angle to examine the impact of the proposed Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) in improving students' speaking performance.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of this mixed-method research were 66 students aged 18 years old from two ESL classes in a Malaysian university. Out of the 66 students, 20 were male and 26 were female students. The mixed method was chosen for this study as the qualitative data will enrich the findings of the study via the perspective of the participants. Besides that, the qualitative data will lend support to the quantitative data. According to Creswell (2003), mixed-method research helps researchers to obtain a comprehensive view of a concept or phenomenon by collecting quantitative and qualitative data to enhance the understanding of a research problem. The participants were convenience sampling. These mixed-proficiency level students were enrolled in a diploma programme from the Faculty of Business and Management. These two intact groups of students were taking the same general English Course taught by the same instructor who has more than 30 years of teaching ESL learners.

Based on the data gathered on the participants' Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) English results, 33 participants were of the intermediate-proficiency level, 27 participants were of low-proficiency level and only 6 participants were of the high-proficiency level for their SPM English.

Instruments

The instruments used in collecting data included an open-ended questionnaire (2 open-ended questions) designed by the researchers, pre-test and post-test, recorded videos of students' role-play, and instructor's online feedback. The open-ended questions are as follows:

1. What are the online strategies used by your instructor to enhance your speaking skills?
2. How useful are the online instructor strategies in enhancing your speaking skills?

A pre-test was carried out in the first week to set a baseline data to measure the students' speaking proficiency before the actual study. The participants were assigned a situation to role-play in pairs or groups of three members. The assigned situation on family matters was aligned with the course goal. The participants of this study sat for a post-test after 11 weeks of receiving instructor scaffolding to examine the impact of online instructor scaffolding strategies on the students' speaking performance. In the post-test, the participants were assigned a situation to role-play in pairs or groups of three members. The topic of the assigned situation was related to a social issue that is aligned with the course goal. Both the pre-test and post-test were conducted via Google Meet and the role-play sessions were recorded.

Procedures

The Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) procedure proposed by the researchers in this study comprised 3 stages, namely planning, implementation and evaluation as shown in Figure 1.

The OISS procedure provides a stepwise guide for instructors to follow in providing useful online scaffolding strategies to raise students' oral engagement; hence developing their speaking skills. In the first week, prior to the planning stage, the students were given a pre-test to gauge their speaking proficiency level. The pre-test was conducted online via Google Meet and the speaking session was recorded. In the planning stage, all 66 students were taught basic communication skills by the same instructor via an online platform (google meet) for three weeks. The instructor highlighted the structure of effective role-play interaction and provided clear guidelines

on the conduct of the role-play. Learners were given clear guidelines on time allocated for preparation and recording of their role-play interactions.
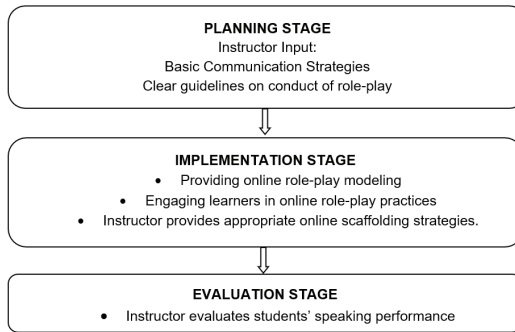
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│               PLANNING STAGE                 │
│               Instructor Input:              │
│         Basic Communication Strategies       │
│      Clear guidelines on conduct of role-play │
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│            IMPLEMENTATION STAGE              │
│    •  Providing online role-play modeling    │
│   •  Engaging learners in online role-play practices │
│ •  Instructor provides appropriate online scaffolding strategies. │
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│              EVALUATION STAGE                │
│  •  Instructor evaluates students' speaking performance │
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Figure 1. Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) Procedure
(Source: Author)

In the implementation stage, the instructor provided online role-play modelling to enlighten learners on the process involved in an effective role-play. Students were shown a sample recorded video of a role-play modelling by a pair of students to guide them. This is followed by 6 weeks of video recordings of students' role-play practices using Zoom or Google Meet that were submitted to the instructor for feedback. The instructor provided a variety of online scaffolding strategies to every student for each recorded role-play practice via an online platform (google classroom, google meet and WhatsApp). This is to facilitate and guide the students to improve their speaking performance so that eventually they can perform as independent learners.

A different role-play situation was assigned weekly for students to be engaged in pair or group role-play practices based on a wide range of issues related to sports, social matters, health, education, college life, finance, food, information technology, career, and self-protection to help broaden their knowledge and vocabulary; thus, enabling them to become independent learners.

In the evaluation stage, the instructor evaluated all the role-play recorded videos submitted by the students each week for 6 weeks and provided appropriate scaffolding to each student to improve his or her speaking performance. A speaking rubric was used to assess each student's

content, language and communicative ability. Oral and written instructor scaffolding strategies were given via online platforms such as google classroom, google meet and WhatsApp to support the students in their speaking performance for the various role-play practices. Consequently, during the last session in Week 12, all 66 students sat for a post-test to determine whether there is any improvement in their speaking performance. The post-test was conducted online via Google Meet and the speaking session was recorded.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analysed for emerging themes on the useful types of online instructor scaffolding strategies. Additionally, some excerpts of online instructor scaffolding strategies and descriptive analysis were used to support the qualitative data. All the data collected were analysed and triangulated. A comparison was also made between the students' pre-test and post-test scores to examine the impact of OISS on students' speaking performance.

Two independent raters were engaged to verify the emerging themes of the qualitative data collected from all the participants. The interrater reliability based on the kappa coefficient for the most useful types of online instructor scaffolding strategies was 0.614 indicating substantial agreement between both raters.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the useful types of online instructor scaffolding strategies to improve students' speaking performance?

Findings disclosed that two types of online instructor scaffolding strategies were perceived to be moderately useful in enhancing students' speaking skills. This is evident in Table 1 which shows the online instructor scaffolding strategies of "indicate and provide an explanation on mistakes" and "providing comments and suggestions for improvement of language and delivery skills" had moderate students' responses of 21.2% for each of

the scaffolding strategies. Ensuing that is "assigning speaking practices to students" with low students' responses of 16.7% and "giving encouragement to read more English materials, converse more in English and to be confident" with low students' responses of 10.6%. It was found that a low 2% of the students perceived that the online instructor scaffolding strategy of 'using guiding questions' and 'providing discussion sessions during online lectures' were less useful in helping to improve their speaking skills.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of the Useful Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies

Perceptions of the Useful Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (n=66)	Frequency (Percentage)
Indicate and explain mistakes	14 (21.2)
Giving encouragement to read more English materials, converse more in English and be confident	7 (10.6)
Assigning speaking practices to students	11 (16.7)
Giving compliments and motivation	5 (7.6)
Providing clear guidelines	6 (9.1)
Providing modeling and supporting materials (sample videos and speaking expressions) on pair and group presentations	5 (7.6)
Providing comments and suggestions for improvement of language and delivery skills	14 (21.2)
Using guiding questions	2 (3.0)
Providing discussion sessions during online lectures	2 (3.0)
TOTAL:	66 (100)

(Source: Author)

Some excerpts to demonstrate the online instructor scaffolding strategy of indicating and providing explanations on mistakes are "Ricky needs to add more ideas to convince Nicky of the benefits in joining swimming class."; and "Aminah, check the tenses used and rephrase your words. Instead of using 'having' and 'balanced food' in your utterance 'Third, I having my balanced food', it should be 'Third, I have a balanced diet'."

Besides that, some excerpts to manifest the online instructor scaffolding strategy of providing comments and suggestions for improvement of language and delivery skills are "Both of you need to contribute more ideas/points and give your reasonings/justifications. You need to sustain the conversation for 4 to 5 minutes."; "Ricky dominated the whole role-play by speaking too much. Do practise turn-taking so that your partner has a

chance to contribute her ideas as well"; and "Good points suggested by Ricky. You have made progress in your delivery of ideas but polish up on your grammatical errors and sentence structure."

Besides that, two examples to illustrate the online instructor scaffolding strategy of assigning speaking practices to students are "More practices are needed to enhance the flow of the conversation."; and "Carry on with the next role-play practice to enhance the flow of your conversation."

Moreover, some excerpts of the online instructor scaffolding strategy of giving encouragement to read more English materials, converse more in English and be confident are "Both are confident, less grammatical errors now."; and "More practices are needed to enhance the flow of the conversation and build confidence to sustain a longer conversation between the both of you."

Research Question 2: In what ways are the Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) useful in enhancing students' speaking performance?

Findings from the open-ended questionnaire showed that students perceived 'Indicating and providing explanation on mistakes' as a useful online instructor scaffolding strategy as it enabled them to identify their weaknesses and gave them the opportunity to correct and learn from their mistakes. They felt that the instructor's careful explanation provided insight into their strengths and weaknesses. Some sample excerpts of the participants' responses on the reasons that 'indicating and providing explanation on mistakes' was a useful online instructor scaffolding strategy include "The most useful feedback strategy used by my instructor in improving my speaking skills is to explain things carefully and give me a deep understanding of my strength and weaknesses", and "The instructor explained on my grammar errors and told me the correct pronunciation of words".

Besides that, some of the students opined that the online instructor scaffolding strategy of 'providing comments and suggestions for improvement of language and delivery skills' helped them to enhance their critical thinking skills, improve the organisation of ideas, and engage

them in active interaction with their group members. Several excerpts to denote the online instructor scaffolding strategy of 'providing comments and suggestions for improvement of language and delivery skills' which is equally useful are "Giving comment on my speaking skills, my wrong vocabulary and grammar errors so that I can improve my speaking"; and "My instructor suggested I improve my organization of ideas. It helped me to think out of the box and figured it out how to get more ideas from the topic for role play".

Additionally, some students felt that the online instructor scaffolding strategy of 'assigning ample speaking practices to students' provides some students with the opportunity to develop and improve their oral fluency in the target language. Examples of students' responses to exemplify the usefulness of the online instructor scaffolding strategy on 'Assigning speaking practices to students' include "Gave me more practices so that I can improve and correct my own mistakes"; and "She gave speaking practices. This helped me to communicate well and speak fluently".

Moreover, some respondents felt that the online instructor scaffolding strategy of "giving encouragement and motivation" is useful in expanding their knowledge and instilling confidence in them. One student expressed "She encouraged me to read more articles or newspapers in English because it can enhance my knowledge plus I will learn new words".

Research Question 3: What is the impact of the Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) on students' speaking performance?

The findings from this study revealed that Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) have an impact on students' speaking performance. As displayed in Table 2, there was an improvement in the students' speaking performance grades in the post-test as compared to the pre-test.

The university speaking test rubrics were used in evaluating the students' speaking performance. Grade A is categorised as 'Excellent'; A- as 'Good'; B+, B and B- as 'Satisfactory'; C+, C and C- as 'Pass'; while D+, D, E and F are categorised as 'Fail'. Based on the university speaking test scoring guideline as shown in Table 2, 7.6% (5) of students scored

Grade A and A- in the post-test as compared to only 1.5% (1) of them who scored Grade A- in the pre-test. In the post-test, the majority (60.6%) of the students (40 out of 66 students) scored between Grade B+, B and B- while only 8 students scored grades of that range in the pre-test. Those who scored Grade C+ had increased to 24.2% (16) as compared to 10.6% (7) in the pre-test. It was found that the number of students who obtained a mere pass with Grade C had dropped from 22.7% (15) in the pre-test to 7.6% (5) in the post-test. Likewise, findings demonstrated that 35 students failed with Grades ranging from C-, D+, D, E to F in the pre-test but no students failed in the post-test. This indicates that the majority of the students had improved their speaking performance grades as a result of using the Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS).

Table 2. Respondents' Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

Scoring Range	Grade	Pre-Test Results	Post-Test Results
		No. (%)	No. (%)
80-89	A	0 (0)	1 (1.5)
75-79	A-	1 (1.5)	4 (6.1)
70-74	B+	2 (3.0)	12 (18.2)
65-69	B	4 (6.1)	11 (16.7)
60-64	B-	2 (3.0)	17 (25.7)
55-59	C+	7 (10.6)	16 (24.2)
50-54	C	15 (22.7)	5 (7.6)
47-49	C-	4 (6.1)	0
44-46	D+	7 (10.6)	0
40-43	D	11 (16.7)	0
30-39	E	11 (16.7)	0
0-29	F	2 (3.0)	0
TOTAL:		66 (100)	66

(Source: Author)

The findings from an in-depth analysis of the students' role-play interactions after receiving online instructor scaffolding showed that the majority of the students have improved their speaking performance in the aspects of content, language and communicative ability. The scoring criteria in Tables 3, 4 and 5 are based on the university speaking test rubrics in which 'Content' constitutes 40%, 'Language' is 40% and 'Communicative

ability' is 20%.

As illuminated in Table 3, 36.4% of the students were very competent in the content contributed during the oral interaction during the post-test as compared to only 7.6% of them in this category during the pre-test. In addition, a large percentage (63.6%) of the students was competent in the content contributed during the oral interaction during the post-test as compared to 46.9% of them in this category during the pre-test. It was found that none of the students was categorised as 'adequate' and 'weak' in the content contributed during the post-test as compared to 41% of them had adequate content and 4.5% had weak content during the pre-test.

Table 3. Students' Achievement for Content Component

	Category	Very competent	Competent	Adequate	Weak	
	Scoring range	30%-40%	20%-29%	10%-19%	0%-9%	TOTAL
		No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	
Pre-Test	Content	5 (7.6)	31 (46.9)	27 (41.0)	3 (4.5)	66 (100)
Post-Test		24 (36.4)	42 (63.6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	66 (100)

(Source: Author)

In the language component, the findings indicated an improvement in language attainment in the post-test. As demonstrated in Table 4, 7.6% of the students had become very confident, 84.8% were reasonably confident and 7.6% were satisfactory in their language used during their oral interaction in the post-test, as compared to 38% were reasonably confident, and 28% used satisfactory language in the pre-test.

Table 4. Students' Achievement for Language Component

	Category	Very confident	Reasonably confident	Satisfactory	Weak	
	Scoring range	30%-40%	20%-29%	10%-19%	0%-9%	TOTAL
		No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	
Pre-Test	Language	0 (0)	38 (57.6)	28 (42.4)	0 (0)	66 (100)
Post-Test		5 (7.6)	56 (84.8)	5 (7.6)	0 (0)	66 (100)

(Source: Author)

In the communicative ability component, the post-test yielded encouraging findings. As portrayed in Table 5, all the students (100%) were generally effective in their communicative ability during the oral interaction with their group members in the post-test, as compared to 81.2% who were generally effective and 18.2% were fairly effective in their oral interaction during the pre-test.

Table 5. Students' Achievement for Communicative Ability Component

	Category	Effective	Generally effective	Fairly effective	Not effective	
	Scoring range	16%-20%	10%-15%	5%-9%	0%-4%	TOTAL
		No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	
Pre-Test	Communicative Ability	0	54 (81.8)	12 (18.2)	0	66 (100)
Post-Test		0	66 (100)	0	0	66 (100)

(Source: Author)

DISCUSSIONS

The findings from this study that the useful online instructor scaffolding strategies of "indicate and provide explanation on mistakes" and "providing comments and suggestions for improvement of language and delivery skills" coincided with those of Sari and Rozimela (2021), Seyedeh Zahra and Behzad Rahbar (2016), Suhartatik and Penggabean (2017) who found that providing feedback, explanation, and suggestions were useful in reinforcing students' comprehension. This instructor scaffolding strategy of providing explanation was useful to the students in this study as they reported that they were unaware of their strengths and weaknesses unless they were pointed out by their instructor and hence, they could correct their mistakes. This scaffolding strategy is pertinent to help students learn and progress in their speaking performance. Thus, the Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) facilitate students to function as independent learners.

In addition, the finding from this study, "assigning speaking practices to students" was found to be a less useful online scaffolding strategy substantiated the findings of Basco, Nicke and Kim (2019) who found that students disagreed that speaking activity helped to improve their composure in speaking. Nevertheless, this finding contradicted the findings in previous studies of Ginaya, Aryana, & Somawati (2018), Sari and Rozimela (2021),

and Suhartatik and Penggabean (2017) which disclosed the benefits of giving oral practices to enhance students' communicative ability. Only some students in this study welcomed speaking practices to help improve their oral communication and speak more fluently. Likewise, this finding is in contrast to that of Naibaho (2019) who revealed that practices helped to improve students' pronunciation and smoothen their conversation. Thus, it can be interpreted that although some students in this study relished and were motivated by the speaking practices, many of the students felt otherwise. This is probably because some of them encountered weak Internet connections and needed more time to be engaged in online speaking practices.

Other than that, the finding, "giving encouragement" was a less useful instructor scaffolding strategy differs from the finding of Sari and Rozimela (2021) and Ginaya, Aryana, and Somawati (2018) who found that teacher's encouragement helped to engage students in learning. In this study, although some students appreciated encouragement and motivation from the instructor to help boost their confidence, many of them were still anxious. This is because they are English as Second Language (ESL) learners and given more time, encouragement from the instructor will help to reduce their anxiety and be more confident

Moreover, the finding in this study, 'using guiding questions' was less useful as an online instructor scaffolding strategy contradicted the findings in Suhartatik and Penggabean's (2017) study. This indicates that the ESL learners had difficulty comprehending the instructors' guiding questions.

Hence, the findings from this study suggested that the Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) improved students' speaking performance in the aspects of content, language and communicative ability which correspond with the positive results of previous studies (Abdelshaheed, 2019; Khalid, 2019) which proposed scaffolding teaching strategies helped to improve students' speaking abilities. These positive results support Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) that learners can function on their own with initial help from a more knowledgeable person.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be concluded from this study that the Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) have an impact on students' speaking performance. As gathered from the findings of this study, among the various types of online instructor scaffolding strategies, "indicate and provide explanation on mistakes" and "providing comments and suggestions for improvement of language and delivery skills" were found to be moderately useful online instructor scaffolding strategies in helping students to improve their speaking performance.

The students perceived that 'indicating and providing explanation on mistakes' is a useful online instructor scaffolding strategy as it enabled them to identify their weaknesses and gave them the opportunity to correct and learn from their mistakes. They felt that the instructor's careful explanation of their mistakes provided insight into their strengths and weaknesses. Besides that, the students opined that the online instructor's scaffolding strategy of 'providing comments and suggestions for improvement of language and delivery skills' helped to enhance their critical thinking skills, improve the organisation of ideas, and engage them in active interaction with their group members. Thus, instructors can capitalise on these two useful online scaffolding strategies to help ESL learners improve their speaking performance. Additionally, while some students felt that the online instructor scaffolding strategy of 'assigning ample speaking practices to students' provides them with the opportunity to develop and improve their oral fluency in the target language, the majority of them felt otherwise. Other than that, the students felt the instructor's scaffolding strategy of 'giving encouragement and motivation' did not instil confidence in them.

Moreover, post-test results showed that the Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) have an impact on students' speaking performance. There was an improvement in the students' speaking performance grades in the post-test as compared to the pre-test.

The findings from this study are meaningful in that regardless of the students' proficiency level, all of them benefitted from the Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) to facilitate their interaction and consequently improve their speaking performance. The invaluable findings from this

study are invested in the instructional procedures which involved careful and detailed planning, implementing, and evaluating the effects of online instructor scaffolding strategies. This indicates that an instructor's proper planning of scaffolding structure and systematic implementation of a variety of online scaffolding strategies are essential to assist students in improving their speaking performance.

Therefore, educators play a leading and pivotal role in delivering meaningful online scaffolding experiences to engage students in deep learning to support traditional classroom learning. In light of this, educators need to reframe their thoughts and strategies to tackle the uphill task of providing careful planning, and useful instructional online scaffolding strategies as input to develop students' communication skills and enhance their speaking performance. This will help students to have a better understanding of the target language and to broaden their thoughts. Besides that, instructors can give useful advice and suggestions to navigate the way for students to upgrade their speaking competence.

Additionally, while more time needs to be allocated for speaking opportunities via online platforms to learn the language, instructors also need to consider the challenges faced by students with weak Internet connections. This will help to boost their self-confidence and eventually they will become independent learners. Once students are acclimatised to speaking in the target language with their peers, they will ultimately be eloquent in the language. In this way, graduates will be equipped with competent oral communication skills and hence have better career prospects in the future.

Thus, findings from this study imply that instructors and educators need to be awakened to the fact that traditional face-to-face classroom interaction is not the only way to improve students' speaking performance, but virtual platforms can also be utilised along with the provision of appropriate and effective online instructor scaffolding strategies to boost students' confidence and speaking competence. In this regard, Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) can benefit both instructors and learners. To realize this end, instructors need to be trained on ways to impart online scaffolding techniques to improve students' speaking skills. In addition, learning institutions need to be equipped with strong Internet connections for online learning to occur. Importantly, policymakers need

to embrace another avenue in the form of online teaching and learning to provide more opportunities for students to practise the target language with guidance from an experienced instructor. Given this, the English language syllabus needs to incorporate creative and innovative ways of online teaching and learning to elevate students' oral proficiency.

Findings in this study are limited to the samples used in this study and cannot be generalised to the whole population. Future studies of this nature can increase the sample size for more conclusive results. Besides that, future research can extend to other English language skills and expand their samples to determine whether Online Instructor Scaffolding Strategies (OISS) have a similar impact on students' performance in those areas concerned. Other factors such as students' attitudes, age and gender can also be compared in future research to ascertain whether there is any influence on the students' oral achievement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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