



LES ACTES DU 1^{er} COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL
DE LA FLLAC
«Lettres, langues, arts et communication au service d'une
nation» publiés par:
LES ANNALES DE LA FLLAC; VOL. 1,
N°1; Décembre 2018
*La revue de la Faculté des Lettres, Langues, Arts et
Communication*



SOMMAIRE:

EDITORIAL	i
ARTS & LITTERATURE	.1
1. AKOGBETO J. M. P. & CAPO CHICHI-ZANOU L. C.: Oppression: A Springboard for.....	1
2. AMEWONOU C. D.: L'identitaire, une esthétique du tragique dans les romans de Williams.....	9
3. NOUMEKPO K.: Grossesse et Dysfonctionnement Sociétal dans l'œuvre Théâtrale de.....	17
DIDACTIQUE & LINGUISTIQUE	2
1. ADJIBI S. S. & YEHOUEYOU C. B.: Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to.....	28
2. ATCHADE J. C.: Langues en disparition: cas du 'Chumbuli' à Gbédé dans la Commune de.....	37
3. BATAMOSSI V. H.: El extranjerismo en la lengua fon de Benín y su influencia sintáctica en....	45
4. DEGBEVI C. A.: Analyse contrastive du temps et de l'aspect dans les langues africaines.....	55
5. FABIYI E. M. & GBETO F.: La comparaison entre quelques idiomes français, anglais et yoruba..	67
6. GBAGUIDI J. K.: Promotion d'une politique d'éducation multilingue et multiculturelle dans	76
7. GBETO M. P. N. & GBETO F.: Métaphores structurales et corps humain en Fon	86
8. HOUNHANOU A. V.: Pedagogical Advisors and EFL Teachers' Scaffolding in Post-.....	97
9. KANTCHOA L.: Les langues transfrontalières du Togo: enjeux, opportunités et défis	111
10. KODJO-SONOU Th. G.: Problems of individual differences among children in the process of...	123
11. LIGAN Ch. D.: Alphabétisation en langues africaines pour la promotion des patrimoines.....	135
12. MALO O.: Les constructions attributives du p ^h uè.....	145
13. OLOU M. A.: La parenthèse en Aja: une influence du continuum –Gbé.....	155
14. ZIME YERIMA I. Introduction à la sémiotique de l'index de la main.....	163
SOCIETE	
1. AGOSSAVI S.: Martin Luther (1483-1546) : Sa contribution à la langue allemande et à la	170
2. YAYI B. S. O.: Le symbolisme de l'arbre dans le rituel de purification Oro	176
ANNONCES	4
Abonnement.....	page 3 couverture
Notes aux auteurs.....	page 4.couverture

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Comité de Rédaction de la revue *ANNALES DE LA FLLAC*,
01 BP 526 COTONOU
République du Bénin

annalesdelafllac@gmail.com
flavien.gbeto@flash.uac.bj

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ISSN 1840-9334

Dépôt légal N° 10957 du lundi 31/12/2018 à la Bibliothèque Nationale du Bénin, 4^{ème} trimestre

Pedagogical Advisors and EFL Teachers' scaffolding in post-observation Feedback conferences in Benin

Arlette Viviane HOUNHANOU

Arlette1970@hotmail.com

Université d'Abomey-Calavi.

Abstract

Lev Vygotsky view of development focuses heavily on language and interaction, and the role they play in helping learners acquire an understanding of the culture in which they live. In the same way that teachers are encouraged to engage students in meaningful learning tasks, pedagogical advisors provide assistance for EFL teachers so that they gain from instructional scaffolding in the form of modeling, questions, prompts, and cues. This paper explores how Pedagogical advisors provide guidance for EFL teachers especially during the post observation feedback sessions. A total of thirty three trainees teachers from the training college (ENS) and seven pedagogical advisors (PA) took part in this research. Overall, the results indicated that a great majority of participants really felt uncomfortable regarding the assistance they received from their mentors and PA after observation. Some of them have a positive view about post observation feedbacks. The outcomes of this research invite PA to focus more on the convention of feedback, and mentors to include the social, and linguistic aspects at the heart of scaffolding.

Keywords : Pedagogical Advisors ; trainees teachers ; scaffolding ; observation ; feedback.

Résumé

La notion du développement de Lev Vygotsky met l'accent sur le langage et l'interaction et leur rôle en aidant les apprenants à acquérir la compréhension de la culture dans laquelle ils vivent. De la même manière que les enseignants sont encouragés à impliquer les apprenants dans l'apprentissage des tâches significatives, les conseillers pédagogiques viennent en aide aux enseignants dans la langue anglaise afin qu'ils puissent bénéficier de cette assistance instructive sous la forme de modélisation, questions, rappel, et indicateurs. Ce travail de recherche a pour but d'explorer la manière dont les conseillers pédagogique assistent et accompagnent les enseignants d'Anglais, spécialement au cours des sessions de feedback et observation de classe. Au total trente trois enseignants stagiaires et sept conseillers pédagogiques ont pris part à cette recherche. Les résultats ont indiqué qu'une grande majorité des participants de la langue anglaise n'ont pas le sentiment d'apprendre des CP après les visites de classe. Certains d'entre eux ont une vue positive des échanges après les observations de classe. Des suggestions sont formulées à l'endroit des conseillers pédagogiques pour qu'ils mettent l'accent plus sur le contenu de l'entretien, sur les volets socio- culturel, et le contexte linguistique au centre de l'assistance.

Mots clés: Conseiller pédagogique; enseignement ; accompagnement; visites de classe

Introduction

The term scaffolding was introduced in the context of tutorials and refers to the help given by a teacher or more able peer in an educational setting. The goal of research in the area of scaffolding has been to explore the nature of the support that the more competent other provides in the learning context (Wood and Wood 1996). It is "an instructional process in which a teacher supports students cognitively, motivationally, and emotionally in learning while helping them to further develop autonomy" (Meyer & Turner, 2002, 18).

In Benin, serious priority and attention needs to be given to EFL teacher education and training in order to facilitate the development of human capital. It is urgent to provide advice and help to novice EFL teachers. Providing professional development for practicing in-service EFL teachers is compulsory. And in the same way that parents scaffolding for their children as they learn to walk, EFL teachers, especially teachers trainees need advice and guidance on their teaching practice in the classroom.

As Vygotsky has demonstrated learning to teach is a social practice. Trainees have to understand this social practice, and how it works, and how to go about the different activities of being a teacher. In addition, knowledge is the product of interaction with others and also with the discourse communities in which the learners are situated (Putnam and Borko 2000).

This research paper focuses on pedagogical advisors' scaffolding and EFL teachers' trainees scaffolding in post observation feedback conference in Benin. Discussion and positive feedback may help trainees construct their knowledge of teaching. Thus the context of providing feedback is essential to how Pedagogical advisors support and scaffold EFL trainees.

1.1 Research objective : To explore how PA provide assistance to EFL trainees teachers after class observation.

1.2 Research Questions :

- 1- How do PA conduct EFL trainees teachers after post observation feedback ?
- 2- In which ways do scaffolding techniques may enhance EFL trainees teachers' teaching practice ?

2. Literature Review

Alexander (2004 :23) gives the following definition of scaffolded dialogue. It is achieving common understanding through structured, cumulative questioning and discussion which guide and prompt, reduce choices, minimize risk and error, and expedite, handover" of concepts and principles".

Roberts and Sarangi (1999) consider the term scaffolding as "gatekeeping discourse" in which the interviewer acts as gatekeeper to the discourse, and ultimately, a qualification. From that comparison, a deduction can be made that the Pedagogical Advisor during the feedback session, holds a similar role.

Wood and Wood (1996) and Lantolf and Thorne (2006) have demonstrated the power that have existed in the teacher or trainer as part of their scaffolding role. Daniels (2001) suggest levels of increasing tutor control in the learning context. These levels range from level 0 which is no assistance, to level 5, which is demonstrate use. This conceptualization of levels of assistance is highly relevant to an examination of scaffolding in interaction in a teacher training context.

There is discussion of how teacher trainers might successfully scaffold in a teacher education context (Black 2007, Bliss et al.1996, McCafferty 2002). In Stone's view, the student is not a passive participant in teacher-student interaction but scaffolding is seen as a fluid, interpersonal process in which both participants are active participants. Both participants actively build common understanding or intersubjectivity through communicative exchanges in which the student learns from the perspective of the more knowledgeable other.

According to Wood et al., scaffolding provided by an expert or adult "enables a child or novice to solve a problem, to carry out a task or to achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (p. 90). They suggest six features of successful scaffolding: (a) recruiting the tutee's interest in the task; (b) reducing the degree of freedom in the task to make it manageable to the tutee; (c) maintaining goal direction; (d) marking critical features; (e) controlling frustration; and (f) modelling solutions to the task. They argue further that scaffolding may eventually result in "development of task competence by the learner at a pace that would outstrip his unassisted efforts" (p. 90).

In addition, there is much discussion and advice on how to train teachers, both native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English native speakers of English (Doff 1988, Harmer 2001, Ur 1999). Studies have been conducted of teacher scaffolding across various curriculum areas (Brodova and Leong 1996, Wollman-Bonilla and Werchadlo 1999). In general, scaffolding is constructed as a support given by a teacher to a student when performing a task that the student might otherwise not be able to accomplish.

Maybin, Mercer and Stierer (1992) point out that the difference between teaching and scaffolding is in the *quality* of this guided intervention. A further aspect of the pre-service teacher training context is the nature of the conventions and norms of certain training activities. This is especially apparent in postobservation feedback sessions. We need to consider whether trainees know the “rules of the game” (Copland, 2010, 465) and whether they know how to play the game. Knowledge is the product of interaction with others and also with the discourse communities in which the learners are situated (Putnam and Borko 2000). Interactional scaffolding in Lev Vygotsky perspective referred to the support in terms of the dialogue between the pedagogical advisor and the teacher.

2.1 Guidance and the teaching and learning process

Learning to teach is a social practice. Trainees have to understand this social practice, how it works, how to go about the different activities of being a teacher. An effective instructor should be very concerned with major stages in the learning process and adopt pragmatic strategies to impact it to the learners while teaching. Guidance has been severally depicted as the assistance given to individuals to enable them make independent and adequate choices, decisions and adjustments in life.

According to Mkpa(1989), guidance is a program of service intended to help students acquire the capacity for self direction or self guidance.

In the field of language learning, Van Lier (2004) notes six features of scaffolding:

- 1) Continuity: repeated occurrences over time, with variations connected to one another;
- 2) Contextual support: a safe but challenging environment, errors are expected and accepted as part of the learning process;
- 3) Intersubjectivity: mutual engagement and support, two minds thinking as one;
- 4) Contingency: the scaffolding support depends on learners' reactions, elements can be added, changed, deleted, repeated, etc.;
- 5) Handover/Takeover: there is an increasing role for the learner when skills and confidence increase;
- 6) Flow: communication between participants is not forced, but flows in a natural way.

2.2 Advisors quality and expectation

There is no ideal type of advisors. According to Blank and Sindelar (1992), “advisors appear to be a unique blend of intuitive sensitivity and technical expertise” (p. 23). Indeed, the presence of a mentor alone is not enough; the mentor's knowledge and skills of how to mentor are crucial to the mentoring process (Ganser, 1996, 2002).

In teacher education, mentoring is typically described as a process to help develop teaching practices, involving a nurturing relationship between a less experienced person and a more experienced person who provides guidance as a role model and adviser (Bigelow, 2002; Haney, 1997). The supervising teacher's role (mentor) is to engage the preservice teacher in learning to teach in developing their teaching practices and in overcoming context-specific difficulties. Feiman and Nemser, and Parker (1992) also prove that mentoring roles and functions are reported to include those of motivator, teacher, role model, supporter, counsellor, advisor, demonstrator, guide, change agent, companion, and coach.

According to Hutto et al (1991, as cited in Sinclair, 2003), a mentor is defined as an “experienced, successful and knowledgeable professional who willingly accepts the responsibility of facilitating professional growth and support of a colleague through a mutually beneficial relationship” (p. 79). Mentors need competent knowledge, skills, and professional proficiency in the chosen field. Mentors are expected to pass on their years of professional knowledge to the less experienced preservice teachers, which requires being

available for discussions (Ganser, 1996, 2002). Therefore, these mentors should be highly-proficient teachers with adept pedagogical knowledge and successful teaching experiences.

2.3 What is Vygotsky's scaffolding ?

Vygotsky proposed that learning depended on the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which he defined as “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”. He strongly believed that students must be taught information with ZPD to develop a relationship with the material, then the scaffolding must be taken away to fully form an understanding.

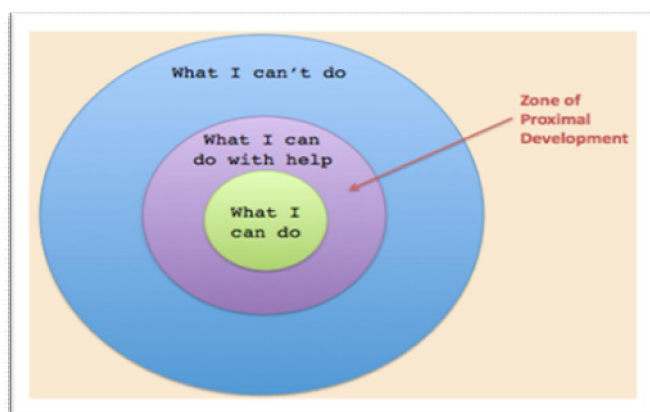


Figure 1 : Illustration of Vygotsky ZPD

If we consider the diagram of Vygotsky, we can understand that the percentage of what the teacher cannot do by himself is considerable. What the teacher can do with assistance is the second circle ; the guidance in that area is called the zone of proximal development. Finally what the teacher possesses in terms of knowledge is little. The assistance will help the teacher to cover and compensate some of his shortcomings. The PA are accountable for what may happen after classroom observation.

3. Research instrument and procedure

To answer the research questions the researcher proceeds on :

- 1- Questionnaire to thirty three EFL teachers.
- 2- Interview with PA, overall seven (7) 2 highly experienced and 5 inexperienced
- 3- Class observation (11) from the thirty 33 pre-selected. Twenty four(24) trainees were interviewed

Arrangement was made to allow the researcher's participation for class observation. The committee was informed about the presence of the researcher. The researcher's presence was justified and authorisation from the college training principal was received. Explanation of the participation was clear. Attention should be focused on trainees' performance, the way trainees conduct teaching, and the valuable advice they may possibly receive from the examining committee.

Table 1 ; Participants, and schools, involved

Participants	Number
Schools	08
Pedagogical Advisors	07
EFL teachers involved	24
EFL teachers observed	09

4. Findings from the questionnaire:

For the first question, twenty seven(27) EFL trainees specify that they have never been observed. Four(4) recognize that they have been observed by their tutors ; and two(2) trainees had made the experience once. For the second question, none of the teachers have never been observed by their peers. For the third question, all trainees received oral feedback. When it comes to answer question number four, 77% of the trainees qualified the feedback as an aggressive one, 7% as a gentle one and 15% as a laissez-Faire. To check their understanding on the lesson learnt from PA, all trainees confirmed that they had received a lot from the members of the examining board. Specifically on the sixth question, all trainees noticed that feedback after class observation was absolutely useful. Regarding the seventh question, twenty(20) trainees agreed to be nervous, four(4) were confident, and nine (09) don't care. For questions eight and nine, all trainees expressed their desire to be observed more frequently in the future and that PA 's suggestions may positively impact their teaching practice. On the tenth question, 72% claimed they were convinced and found the advice relevant. 16 % were not convinced, and 11% did not really know about the nature of the appreciation. Dealing with the eleventh question, nineteen (19) of trainees claimed that they were confused during the post observation class, nine (09) claimed they were sometimes confused, and four (04) confess they were not confused at all. The last question shows that seventeen (17) never had the opportunity to express themselves after the feedback, fifteen (15) agree to have the opportunity.

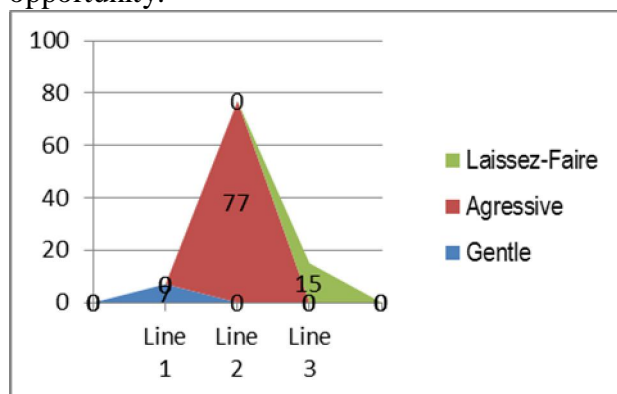


Figure 2 : Qualification of the Feedback

4.1 Findings from the interview

4.2 Interview for Pedagogical Advisors

1- What do you check from the trainee teacher ?

They check on the lesson structure, the way the lesson opens, the development, and the way it closes. We also check on the number of the different activities designed. Attention is focused on the transition used between the different activities. Next we check on classroom management techniques. The use of the board, time management, group forming, the seating arrangement, the order, etc.

2- What do you do after observation ?

Generally speaking PA reported to focus on what worked well, and what did not work. Moreover, they check if the goal/objective of the lesson is reached. Finally they provide relevant advice for the future. However the main concern of the majority of EFL trainees teachers is that they lack confidence. EFL trainees are not well equipped to meet students's needs. Academically, they have problems specifically in phonetics, in vocabulary, and in grammar.

3-What do you know from the trainees' mentors ?

Trainees are sent to several secondary schools. Normally the teaching council decide on the teacher advisor in English and the latter is allowed to train and coach the trainee. This may depend on the number of the trainees per each secondary school. Sometimes due to the shortage of EFL teachers, some trainees do not have the opportunity to obtain real mentors. Consequently, the situation generates couple of issues. The main is at the academic and pedagogic level. Those who are supposed to train are not qualified and also need hands on teaching practices. The other issue is due to the incentive they receive from the training school (ENS). Some mentors ask and select the maximum of trainees (Six to ten) and decide to work with them when they know that it is quite impossible. Or they may ask part-time teachers for help. Finally they sign in at the part-time teachers place and declare they did the job sololy.

5- What would you have suggested in the future ?

They all suggested an alternative regarding the organization of the training. The timelag between the the academic courses (theory), and the trainees practicum is too short. They all require additional period so that the trainees learn from their lecturers and mentors. They ask for four years, among which a year for the internship.

4.3 Interview for teachers trainees

1- When did ENS spend you to your school and how long did it take in terms of internship ?

In terms of internship. It will be difficult to use the term internship. Due to the strike in the majority of public schools, the trainees spent approximately two weeks in their respective schools. Some of them spent three weeks included the evaluation period.

2- What did you do exactly ?

They follow their tutors in the classroom. Some of them help in correcting students'papers. Others help in calculating students'marks and let them know their grade. In 3^{ème}, six out of eleven turned that they followed the tutor while revising some key points in grammar and writing.

3- What have you learnt from your tutor and PA after classroom conference ?

They have learnt a lot on how to form learners in group while revising. They have also gain hands on classroom management, some aspects of discipline and pronunciation of words. There was much complaints than advice during the conference. Three participants have confessed that PA did not spend the due minutes while observing. *"It was incredible to teach in such a way"*these were exactly the words of one of the observer. It was perceived as an humiliation.

4- Was it helpful ? I mean your tutor's role ?

They did not gain that much from tutors in terms of knowledge. Time constraint did not permit to learn more from teaching practice. It depends heavily on the schedule and the training school's arrangement with the setting of internship.

5-What would you suggest in terms of improvement ?

For the future promotion of students trainees, the training college may negotiate the internship earlier, either some weeks during the first and second terms of school period, so that trainees have the opportunity to learn more from tutors and have contact with students, and be involved and witness how to interact them.

4.4 Findings from class observation

The researcher took note on PA remarks and advice. Here are the summary of area EFL teachers trainees need to reconsider :

Table 2 : Areas of reconsideration during the feedback conference

Mismanagement of the board
The teacher talking time TTT is higher
The teacher who put pressure on students“Hurry up hurry up”
Lack of assistance of students while working in group
The production of students are not equitable
The teacher is the only one to ask and to answer
The teacher relies too much on the guide
Starter situation is brutal. Lack of transition and contextualization
Mismatch between the picture and the reading purpose
Inappropriate questions asked
Absence of interaction
Absence of motivation, no praising
Classroom too quiet
Mispronunciation are not corrected systematically
The assessment is poor
The teacher do not use color chalk
Lack of confidence

From class observation : Over all, eight EFL teachers were completely lost in terms of organization, lesson planing, the language used, syntax, and pronunciation.

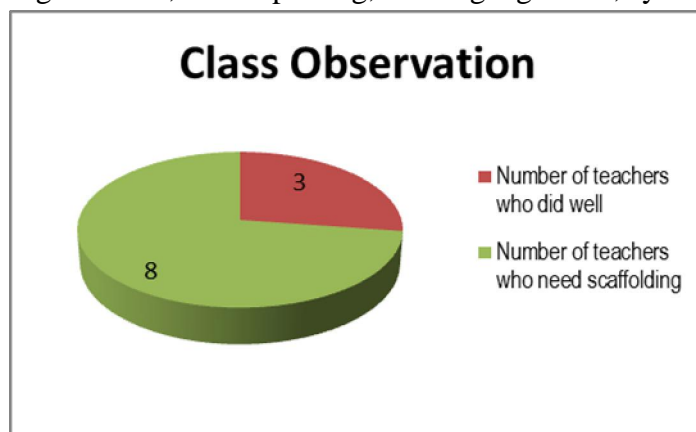


Figure 3 : Illustration of class Observation

5.Implications, Suggestions, and Discussion

The present study has many implications. Using the idea of scaffolding and zone of proximal development could help a trainee teacher to line up the things they need to teach for a whole year and build a sequence by which students will slowly acquire knowledge. The zone of proximal development a skill that is too difficult for a trainee teacher to master on his own, but it can be done with guidance and encouragement from a knowledgeable person. Mentors especially have a great responsibility towards this category of teachers. They should path the road, give them secret, tips, and tricks for how to do well. Trainees as in the metaphor of Vygotsky should be put on task. Repetition is the mother of learning, the father of action, and ultimately leads to accomplishment according to the terms of Zig Ziglar (2003).

One of the great issue while observing the trainees lies on the fact that they were not provided with the concret tools to make them aware of what they were be teaching. A list of what EFL trainees teachers should do was depicted. Examples and follow-up training were not scheduled to assist them. So, the main issue is not to provide EFL teachers with a list of what they should normally do. But to make sure that they were really aware of their mistake and to categorize errors for a training. For pronunciation errors, a workshop may help teachers handle the situation. PA may work collaboratively with lecturers specialized on Applied Linguistics during the Easter, and Christmas break time. For the same lesson, examples and practice of a more experienced teacher can be an opportunity for them to learn.

From the questionnaire and interview, the researcher suggests that schools decision-makers revise if need be reduce completely PA schedule from 12 hours to 04 per week. This will help them in designing samples of some lesson planning. Furthermore, school administrators should empower PA in their schools so that they consider scaffolding as a priority. PA should also be trained on how to provide productive feedback because feedback conferences should reflect a real exchange. PA especially young one should learn on how to inject more humour. It is also compulsory that PA update their knowledge and skills t because there were some contradictions in terms of what trainees needed to do exactly.

Dealing with trainees properly, there is a need to keep in touch with the content of curriculum from the first year to the fourth year. Learn more from the guide and how to use it. Trainees start from the second year but this is not sufficient. They may work constantly in their respective school and build a portofolio after the third year. This will help them as a package through their carrier. There is a need to scaffold them on how to teach in a nonthreatening environment, reinforce regularly teaching practice through class observation.

Daily debriefing among trainees at the end of each day may be beneficial. Trainees teachers may spend 55 minutes to debrief what they had observed and offer their reflective comments relative to their own EFL teaching context. They may shift classes and observation period per week. They may also share their observational and learning journals with their peers. This activity will provide the opportunity for teachers, individually and as a team, to reflect upon and discuss what they had learned, what they did not yet understand, and those areas upon which they wished to receive elaboration. All these will be a contribution to take advantages of supervisors' feedback, to consider reports of exchange visits, and prepare a portfolio for each curriculum they teach.

The present study aimed to shed light on scaffolding EFL trainees. For the first research question on how PA conduct EFL trainees teachers after post observation feedback, the majority of participants were deceived and not satisfied. The results of the interview and of the questionnaire confirm that PA need to reconsider a couple of parameters to make a decision on EFL trainees performance. Participants complained about PA's bad attitude during the observation sometimes, and during the conference. They reported to be frustrated

especially in classroom situation in front of their learners. Students could easily guess from their reaction that things were not going smoothly. For the second research question on how scaffolding techniques may enhance EFL trainees teachers' teaching practice, they reported that the earlier, they are involved into the teaching practice, the best they will feel comfortable in the teaching job. This idea supports the idea of Brian Tracy (2000) when he contends that "practice is the philosophy of continuous improvement". He adds that people should get a little bit better every single day. From EFL answers and PA interview, it derives that there is a correlation between the idea of sharing knowledge and agreement regarding the competency-Based Approach (CBA) programs.

In addition, the findings of this study support Stone's contention because in general, scaffolding is construed as support given by a teacher to a student when performing a task that the student might otherwise not be able to accomplish. In the same way that trainees are not strong enough to meet learners' needs, PA should be flexible in providing advice and guidance. Trainees should never be held accountable for all mistakes.

Nevertheless, there is a main challenge for the idea of Vygotsky scaffolding. The great challenge remains in its measurement. In fact, scaffolding is a time-consuming and it requires great patience. Also, the instrument used here in the case of teaching is not reliable. Its reliability may remain in the frequency of daily teaching practice. The presence of the researcher in the classroom and during post observation feedback could have impacted the performance of the trainees, and members of the examining board's attitude.

Conclusion

To conclude, the use of scaffolding as a metaphor within the domain of learning refers to the educational Psychology, and it is term borrowed from the field of construction, where it is temporary a structure erected to help with the building or modification of another structure. From the findings, the majority of EFL trainees teachers are not clear enough about what they really want to teach. Decisions are not often made in terms of the strategies and methods they're going to use in order to help learners. PA and especially mentors have a role to play in trainees respective setting. It is a long process over time. The more teachers practice, the more they will gain confidence.

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QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGNED FOR TRAINNES TEACHERS

I'm carrying out a research work on Scaffolding EFL trainees teachers. Please read the statement carefully and tick the right case which reflect most your opinion. The information you provide may serve as illustrations and authentic arguments to exemplify the data and the problem related to the topic. Thanks.

1- How often have you been observed by your mentor ?

Once

more than three times

never

2- How often have you been observed by your peers ?

Once

more than three times

never

3- What kind of feedback do you receive in your Practicum?

Oral

neutral

written ?

4- How would you qualify the feedback ?

Gentle

agressive

laisser-faire

5- Do you think that something has changed in terms of your teaching practice ?

Yes In some degree No

6- Do you think feedback observation is useful ?

Yes In some degree No

7- How do you feel during class observation ?

Nervous confident Don't care

8- Would you like PA and inspectors to visit you more frequently in the coming year ?

Yes No sometimes

9- Do you think PA and inspectors' suggestions may impact your teaching practice ?

Yes No Somehow

10- Do you think PA and Inspectors's remarks are relevant and convinceable ?

Yes No don't know

11- Do you have the feeling that you are confused during the conference ?

Yes No A litte bit

12- Do you have an opportunity to express yourself after the feedback?

Yes No

INTERVIEW SHEET FOR TRAINEES TEACHERS

- 1- When did ENS spend you to your school and how long did it take in terms of internship ?
- 2- What did you do exactly ?
- 3- What have you learnt from your tutor and PA after classroom conference ?
- 4- Was it helpful ? I mean your tutor's role ?
- 5- What would you suggest in terms of improvement ?

INTERVIEW SHEET FOR PEDAGOGICAL ADVISORS

- 1- What do you check from the teacher trainee ?
- 2- What do you do after observation ?
- 3- What do you know from the trainees' mentors ?
- 4- What would you have suggested in the future ?