TÁC ĐỘNG CỦA PHƯƠNG PHÁP GIÀN GIÁO TỚI NĂNG LỰC TỰ CHỦ CỦA NGƯỜI HỌC - NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP TRONG MỘT KHÓA HỌC GIAO TIẾP LIÊN VĂN HÓA

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Bài viết trình bày một nghiên cứu trường hợp điển hình về tác động của phương pháp giàn giáo đối với sự phát triển tính tự chủ của người học trong khoá học Giao tiếp liên văn hóa tại Khoa tiếng Anh, Trường Đại Học Hà Nội, Việt Nam. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua hình thức phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc với 11 sinh viên. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy phương pháp giàn giáo đóng góp đáng kể cho sự phát triển năng lực tự chủ thông qua cơ chế chuyển giao trách nhiệm từ người hướng dẫn sang người học. Việc áp dụng phương pháp này một cách có chiến lược trong và sau khoá học cho phép sinh viên hình thành được những hành vi đặc trưng cho tính tự chủ ngày càng cao. Nghiên cứu này nhấn mạnh vai trò thiết yếu của phương pháp giàn giáo trong thúc đẩy năng lực tự chủ của người học và nêu bật vai trò của việc tích hợp phương pháp này vào giảng dạy các khoá học ngôn ngữ.

Từ khóa: *phương pháp giàn giáo, năng lực tự chủ của người học, sự phát triển.*

This case study investigates the impacts of scaffolding on the development of learner autonomy in an Intercultural Communication course at the English Department of Hanoi University, Vietnam. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eleven student participants. The findings indicate that scaffolding significantly enhances learner autonomy by gradually shifting responsibility from instructors to students. The strategic application of scaffolding throughout and beyond the course enabled students to exhibit behaviors characteristic of progressively higher autonomy. This study highlights the essential role of scaffolding in fostering learner autonomy and emphasizes the need for educators to integrate structured scaffolding strategies into language courses.

Keywords: *scaffolding, learner autonomy, development.*

IMPACTS OF SCAFFOLDING ON LEARNER AUTONOMY – A CASE STUDY IN AN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COURSE

1. Introduction

Learner autonomy, or the capability for self-directed learning, has been documented as essential for fostering successful language learners (Duong, 2021). Attaining autonomy can be

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challenging for learners as its development is claimed to progress through multiple levels, from lower to higher (Benson, 2001). Thus, scaffolding has emerged as the instructional practice in the initial phase of learning to gradually establish learner autonomy through several pedagogical acts such as modeling and offering contextualization (Walqui, 2006). Recent studies have confirmed a positive relationship between scaffolding techniques and the development of learner autonomy (Chen, 2020; Maryantini et al., 2020). However, existing research has not explicitly identified the extent to which teachers' scaffolds contribute to each stage of the autonomy-development process, despite the fact that understanding this process helps educators design suitable interventions for the establishment of learner autonomy.

In the context of an Intercultural Communication (IC) course at the English Department, Hanoi University, fostering autonomous learning behaviors is critical for some reasons. First, having learning autonomy when studying IC potentially allows students to profoundly understand intercultural theories, enabling them to apply these concepts in various prospective multicultural settings. Second, English Department students receive four semesters of language skills training before progressing to the IC course. This transition may pose challenges as the learners have to adjust to theoretical learning and its application in analyzing cultural differences (Friedman & Antal, 2005). Such a noticeable shift demands teacher scaffolding to foster autonomy development.

Considering the aforementioned gap in the literature and the role of scaffolding in fostering autonomy in an unfamiliar course for English majors, particularly the IC course, this case study aims to investigate the extent to which scaffolding techniques contribute to different levels of autonomy. The result of this study might inform educators' decisions to integrate scaffolding into their classes to achieve the desired degree of autonomy.

Based on this aim, the research question of the current study is:

- To what extent does scaffolding impact the development of learner autonomy in an Intercultural Communication course?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is defined in multiple ways in the field of foreign language learning and teaching, each highlighting a different aspect. Holec (1981) pioneered a widely-cited definition, equating learning autonomy with the "ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p.3). He continues to specify these as abilities to set learning goals, select methods, content, and pace, as well as monitor learning progress and assess outcomes. Similarly, Little (1991) also associates learners with "a capacity for

detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action" (p.4). The definitions by both Holec (1981) and Little (1991) seemingly give a central focus on the learners' constructs of capacity in learning. On the other hand, more recently, Trinh and Rijlaarsdam (2003) consider the attitudinal factor in their definition, contending that an autonomous learner needs positive attitudes, motivation, and ability to control their language learning (planning, monitoring, and assessing their own communicative and learning acts) - either independently or with other people. This definition raises the question of whether true learner autonomy implies working alone or with others.

In the present literature, one of the controversial views is expressed through Dickinson's (1987) definition, linking learner autonomy to "complete responsibility for one's learning, carried without the involvement of a teacher or pedagogic materials" (p.11), emphasizing that any shared control is merely a preparatory stage for autonomy. However, subsequent authors such as Benson (2001) and Dam (1995) justly challenge the claim by Dickinson (1987). Specifically, Dam (1995) rightly believes autonomy denotes "a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others" (p.102). This idea holds validity as learner autonomy is repeatedly claimed to equate learners' capabilities to independently fulfill a range of tasks (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). Sharing this perspective, Benson (2001) argues that learning goals cannot be attained individually, but rather collaboratively because skills and knowledge are constructed through the co-sharing of perspectives and experiences. Benson's (2001) claim seems to align with Vygotsky's (1978) influential Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT), underscoring that cognitive development is inherently linked to social interactions, especially with a more capable person. Consequently, it can be implied that interaction is a crucial element in fostering autonomy, the perceived cognitive capability to monitor their own learning. Given these arguments, it is justifiable to maintain that learner autonomy does not mean complete separation from assistance. Therefore, the current study adapts Trinh and Rijlaarsdam's (2003) definition, framing learner autonomy as a situation where learners have abilities, positive attitudes, motivation and collaboration with other learners. Teachers' intervention indeed has been mentioned in a number of autonomy-building models such as Nunan's (1997) and Littlewood's (1996). The elaboration of the steps involved in each model is listed in the next Section.

2.2. Types of Learner Autonomy

In response to the growing interest in 'learner autonomy' in the last few decades, a number of researchers have proposed numerous models for developing autonomy (e.g., Benson, 2007; Nunan, 1997). Nunan (1997) proposes a five-level

model, attempting to describe the progression of learner independence. In Table 1, **Content** represents teachers' pedagogical guidance to students, in terms of both teaching strategies and materials. **Process** emphasizes particular learning activities implemented by students in response to teachers' instruction. These activities depict the levels of learner autonomy that learners have acquired, presented as **Learner Action.** Nunan's (1997) is selected as the framework serving the investigation of learner autonomy and scaffolding in this study because it demonstrates the gradual reduction of teacher support across five levels of learner autonomy, which is the defining feature of scaffolding. In Level 1, **Awareness,** teachers play a central role by explicitly presenting learning objectives and providing guidance for students when using class materials. In the **Involvement Level**, teachers offer choices and start to shift decision-making on learning goals, class materials, and activities to learners. By **Intervention**, teachers reduce control further, allowing students to modify goals while still providing scaffolding. In the **Creation Stage**, teacher support seems to be further diminished, as learners set their own objectives and design tasks. Finally, in **Transcendence,** the teacher's role seems minimal, with learners applying their knowledge beyond the classroom, achieving full autonomy.

Table 1. *Five-level model of learner autonomy (Nunan, 1997, p.195)*

Level	Learner Action	Content	Process
1	**Awareness**	Learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the materials they are using.	Learners identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles/strategies.
2	**Involvement**	Learners are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer.	Learners make choices among a range of options.
3	**Intervention**	Learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and contents of the learning program.	Learners modify/adapt tasks.
4	**Creation**	Learners create their own goals and objectives.	Learners create their own tasks.
5	**Transcendence**	Learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of classroom learning and the world.	Learners become teachers and researchers.

It appears that the framework entails a progression from a lower to a higher level of autonomy. The higher the level, the less the amount of teachers' intervention. The researchers of the current studies question whether specific terms exist to describe the types of autonomy corresponding to different levels of autonomy highlighted in Nunan's (1997) framework. It has come to our attention that Littlewood (1996) introduced a distinction between two types of autonomy. *Proactive autonomy* underscores learners' individuality and involves them in mapping their own learning directions. On the contrary, *reactive autonomy* allows learners to independently organize their resources to achieve the set targets. Reactive autonomy likely encompasses processes depicted in levels One to Two in Nunan's (1997) model, where learners still require some orientation from teachers. Meanwhile, Proactive autonomy apparently entails setting goals, creating materials, and independently discovering new subject matters, which align with levels Three, Four, and Five in Nunan's (1997) framework.

2.3. Scaffolding

In the field of education, the concept of scaffolding suggests a progressive amount of aid, which is subsequently dismantled to allow students to take responsibility for their learning (Slavin, 2009). This concept is strongly connected with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which proposes that there are two levels of cognitive development: The actual level and the potential level. The progress to the latter can only occur with pedagogical interventions within the ZPD and scaffolding provides a framework for teachers to determine the types of assistance necessary for their students. To assist educators, including language teachers, in structuring their support in a systematic and diversified manner, Walqui (2006) proposes a model relevant to investigating the extent to which scaffolding techniques influence learner autonomy. This is because this framework also grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) SCT, which also underpins Nunan's (1997) structure on learner autonomy. Specifically, to Walqui (2006), interaction is the primary mechanism through which learning occurs; therefore, it could be seen that the suggested strategies in the model aim to engage learners in collaborative activities. The same emphasis on social interaction between the framework on both scaffolding and learner autonomy would potentially facilitate examining the relationship between these two concepts. The following section details the six types of scaffolds and their links with the SCT (Vygotsky, 1978)

According to Walqui (2006), teachers could offer six types of scaffolding, namely *Modelling, Bridging, Contextualising, Schema building, Representing texts, and Developing metacognition.*

a. Modelling

According to Walqui (2006), modelling involves allowing learners to observe

performance from an expert. Therefore, in the language classroom, teachers should explicitly demonstrate new concepts through a variety of strategies. For example, in a language classroom, to help students become capable of communicating about a certain topic, teachers should model language patterns such as topic-based vocabulary and relevant grammatical structures. More importantly, teachers should convey their expectations of certain products and learning outcomes to students. This strategy embraces the notion that learning is mediated through connection with a more proficient individual, hence showing a connection with one of the principles of the SCT.

b. Bridging

This is the technique that depicts the employment of learners' prior knowledge to teach new skills and knowledge. This concept has its roots in SCT, which postulates that learning is formed upon previous social and cultural experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Students could develop the knowledge base through the constant update of pre-existing knowledge about their surroundings. Teachers can have students prepare an anticipatory guide, which consists of two columns: one is what students know about a topic, and the other is questions they have about a certain topic (Walqui, 2006).

c. Contextualizing

Contextualizing denotes teachers' utilization of authentic contexts to introduce new concepts in classrooms. Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the idea that cognitive development is shaped by cultural values; therefore, materials reflecting social, cultural, and linguistic facets should be brought into class. Lightbown and Spada (2006) are advocates of this idea, providing that culturally oriented materials should be embedded in language instruction. Regarding the types of materials, in addition to written resources such as coursebooks, non-verbal tools such as pictures, videos, and realia can be incorporated.

d. Schema building

Schema is the term which refers to conventional knowledge that exists in a person's memory (Walqui, 2006). The technique of building schema refers to the implementation of a variety of classroom activities to construct students' general knowledge. Learners could get an overall sense of new knowledge by previewing related texts, illustrations, charts and pictures. This provides an opportunity for learners to develop mental frameworks about real-world scenarios, which inevitably encompass culture-related information.

e. Representing texts

This refers to learners' engagement in genre transformation. Walqui (2006) argues that this type of activity not only bears meaningful context but also ensures fair participation across classes. This paves the way for the generation of new forms of

texts through collaboration, which coincides with the SCT principle that emphasizes learning through social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978).

f. Developing metacognition

Metacognition has been referred to as the ability to monitor one's understanding and decide when it is not adequate (Walqui, 2006). Several cognitive strategies can be named Reciprocal Teaching and Think Aloud. In Reciprocal Teaching, students teach one another by summarizing text, asking questions, generating quizzes and discussing content. Think-aloud is a strategy in which learners have to stop midway while engaging with a text to vocalize their opinions and do research to defend their viewpoints. To summarize, these activities aim at developing students' self-regulation, a key concept in the SCT (Vygotsky, 1978).

Through the presentation of scaffolding techniques suggested by Walqui (2006) and their close connection with principles of SCT, it could be concluded that the recommended scaffolding strategies in the framework can be adapted in this study to examine the connection between scaffolding learner autonomy.

2.4. The role of scaffolding in developing learner autonomy.

Scaffolding serves as a structured mechanism that gradually supports learners in becoming autonomous by initially providing guidance and then intentionally reducing it (Van de Pol et al., 2010)

In the initial phase of learning, Walqui's (2006) scaffolding techniques help develop learners' skills for tasks outlined in levels 1 to 4 of Nunan's (1997) framework of learner autonomy. The following details how each level can be supported by specific scaffolding strategies.

- **Awareness and Involvement:** *Modeling* suggests teachers demonstrate tasks and learning goals for learners, therefore facilitating their progression from *awareness* to *involvement,* as learners can only make goal choices when they are well-informed of a series of expectations (Nunan, 2003). *Schema building* promotes Learner involvement by updating students with new skills and knowledge, thus probably allowing learners to make informed choices about the most feasible learning strategies for them.
- **Intervention:** In this stage, learners take a more active role by modifying and adapting tasks to fit their needs. *Modeling* remains important here by providing expectations of a suitable task. *Contextualization* supports Intervention by helping learners make changes to tasks within authentic contexts, thus making the prospective tasks more meaningful (Vygotsky, 1978).

- **Creation:** In this phase, learners generate their own learning goals and tasks. Several scaffolding techniques, such as *developing metacognition* and *bridging* facilitate this process. *Bridging* is relevant as it instructs students to make connections with past experiences with new learning, thereby empowering them to build new tasks based on the experience they have had from modifying tasks. Besides, *Developing metacognition* assists by encouraging self-reflection and goal-setting, which are essential skills to create their own learning activities (Reeve, 2016). For instance, when asked to provide feedback to a training program, students can make use of metacognitive skills to generate necessary criteria for an improved course.

In the subsequent phase of learning, scaffolding can be faded (or withdrawn) – the key characteristic of scaffolding highlighted by Van de Pol et al (2010). This implies that scaffolding can be diminished once initial strategies like *Modeling* have helped develop students' confidence to make choices, modify and generate tasks, corresponding with levels 1 to 4 in Nunan's (1997) model. Scaffolding can be dismantled once the learner is capable of self-monitoring and self-accessing their own learning (Little, 1991). This competence is reflected in the highest level of learner autonomy in Nunan's (1997) framework: Transcendence. The phase indicates that learners, by now, can take full ownership of their learning, becoming self-regulated learners and researchers. Therefore, it can be justifiably stated that scaffolding plays a crucial role in the early stages of learning but is progressively withdrawn as learners achieve autonomy.

Empirically, Weinstein (2017), Meri-Yilan, (2019), Maryantini et al. (2020) and Chen (2020) have conducted studies demonstrating the positive connection between scaffolding and learner autonomy. Specifically, Weinstein (2017) and Meri-Yilan (2019) explore this relationship in the contexts of pre-service teacher education and online learning and both studies observe autonomous learning behaviors following a single scaffolding intervention. Maryantini et al. (2020) report that high school students exposed to scaffolding strategies exhibit higher levels of learner autonomy and improved writing competence, while Chen (2020) finds that scaffolded inquiry-based learning positively influences student autonomy in English as a foreign language setting, specifically encouraging students to become active knowledge seekers, thereby enhancing their autonomy.

Collectively, these studies underscore the effectiveness of scaffolding in enhancing learner autonomy. However, the conclusions only emphasize the significant effect of scaffolding without providing detailed insight into the developmental

process or specifying how far scaffolding helps students reach specific levels of autonomy. The gap delineates the need for further research.

3. Research methods

3.1. Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The research context was the Intercultural Communication course of the English Department at Hanoi University. The seven-week course, which laid the foundation for students to develop intercultural competence, took place after students had finished the two-year English language skills training and required them to engage in higher-order cognitive skills to analyze theoretical concepts. This shift presented notable challenges and called for degrees of support from teachers. Moreover, autonomous learning was valued in this course, as it encouraged students to pursue ongoing cultural research beyond the classroom as part of their continued development of intercultural competence.

The study consisted of eleven English Department's students of the cohort 2021-2025. They were all in their third academic year at the time the research was conducted. While this relatively small sample size implies a limitation regarding generalizability, it offers valuable qualitative insights into students' experiences and perceptions, which align with the study's exploratory nature. The sampling approach in this study is a combination of purposive sampling and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants had direct and relevant experience with the IC course (Cohen et al., 2007). To be specific, the selection criterion included students who had completed the course within the most recent academic term. After the target group was identified, convenience sampling was utilized to recruit individuals who were accessible and willing to participate (Cohen et al., 2007). This mixed sampling approach is necessary to balance specificity with feasibility.

3.2. Design of the Study

This study employed a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' learning behaviors in response to different contexts where scaffolding was provided (Bryman, 2016). The rich, descriptive data capturing participants' experiences and perceptions were critical for revealing their levels of learner autonomy. Additionally, a case study design was particularly suitable for this research, as it provided rich and detailed insights into a specific context where individuals and their behaviors are examined (Cohen et al., 2007). Given that this study explored the impacts of scaffolding on learner autonomy, it was essential to investigate a setting where scaffolding played a critical role. The IC course, characterized by the aforementioned challenge regarding autonomy, served as an appropriate context where scaffolding was necessary.

By combining qualitative and case study approaches, this research ensured an in-depth exploration of how scaffolding influenced learner autonomy, with both the settings and learning behaviors rigorously pictured.

3.3. Data Collection & Analysis

Data collection instrument

Given the study's objective of exploring the relationship between scaffolding and learner autonomy, semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data collection tool as it allowed both consistency and flexibility (Cohen et al., 2007). This approach enabled the researchers to incorporate the core questions specifically describing when and how each scaffolding method was used while adapting subsidiary questions to exploit more details of learners' experiences that indicated learner autonomy.

The semi-structured interview includes nine core questions, along with possible subsidiary questions thoroughly devised by both researchers. Each core question describes a scaffolding method used in the IC course. These methods are proposed by Nunan (2003) and Walqui (2006), each of which was intentionally implemented to support the development of a specific level of autonomy in Nunan's (1997) five-level model. The mapping of scaffolding methods to autonomy levels is based on the pedagogical guidance targeted at particular degrees of autonomy outlined in Nunan's (1997) model. Table 2 summarizes the content of the nine core questions.

Table 2. *The content of the interview questions*

Question	Scaffolding method	Application	Targetted level of learner autonomy
1	Step 4 of the nine-step procedure (Nunan, 2003): Raising learner awareness	Providing the objectives, content and timeline of the course	Learner awareness
2	Step 4 of the nine-step procedure (Nunan, 2003): Raising learner awareness	Providing materials for pre-reading	
3	Bridging (Walqui, 2006)	Activating prior knowledge	
4	Schema building (Walqui, 2006)	Providing options for note-taking and connecting ideas	Learner involvement
5	Modelling (Walqui, 2006)	Providing a model answer for a new task	Learner intervention
6	Conceptualizing (Walqui, 2006)	Providing examples to explain abstract concepts	

Question	Scaffolding method	Application	Targetted level of learner autonomy
7	Developing metacognition (Walqui, 2006)	Designing summative assessment	Learner creation
8	Step 8 of the nine-step procedure (Nunan, 2003): Encourage learners to become teachers	Providing a learner course feedback form	
9	Step 9 of the nine-step procedure (Nunan, 2003): Encourage learners to become researchers	Providing a learner course feedback form	Learner transcendence

Data collection procedure

An invitation was sent to all students of the IC course through Microsoft Teams, informing them of the study's purpose. Within five days, as announced, any students who replied with a willingness to participate in the study were sent consent forms with no selection bias. The consent forms ensured that they understood their right to withdraw at any time without needing to provide a reason or consequences and that their information and responses would be anonymized and not revealed to any third parties other than the researchers to maintain confidentiality. Once the decision had been made, they contacted the researcher to confirm their attendance and suggested time for the interviews.

All interviews were conducted online through Microsoft Teams Meetings. Nine core questions were sent to the participants in advance, allowing them to note down ideas if desired. The duration for each interview was about thirty minutes, with the content audio-recorded under the consent of the participants. The participants could code-switch between English and Vietnamese at any time they wanted.

Data analysis

The data obtained through the interviews were transcribed from the audio-recorded dialogues and analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis aligns with this objective as the progression could be broken down into five themes, corresponding to five levels of lower-to-higher autonomy in Nunan's (1997) model. Each theme consisted of responses to interview questions of scaffolding methods targeted at developing an autonomy level for that theme. For example, responses to questions 1, 2, and 3, which examined three scaffolding techniques designed to develop the first level of autonomy, were categorized under Theme 1.

Following theme classification, the data underwent a coding process to identify

specific learning behaviors within each theme. For instance, the codes "the ability to make plans for learning" and "the ability to identify strategies for learning" were categorized under Theme 1, corresponding to learning behaviors demonstrated in the first level of autonomy—Learner Awareness. These codes were derived from student responses such as *"I was able to make a brief plan regarding assessment"* and *"I made a specific to-do list for the course."*

To enhance the reliability of the analysis, each interview was double-coded by the two reseachers (authors of this paper). Coding discrepancies were addressed through a structured review process, where both researchers independently coded the data before comparing results. Any inconsistencies were discussed and resolved through frequent meetings, ensuring inter-coder agreement before finalizing the codes and themes.

4. Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Impacts of scaffolding targeted at learner awareness

With a view to promoting students' ability to devise plans for their study and identify preferred learning strategies, which represents learner awareness – the first level of learner autonomy in Nunan's (1997) five-level model, the course's instructor utilized two scaffolding methods that align with the pedagogical guidance provided for this level.

First, the course's instructor applied Step Four in Nunan's (2003) nine-step procedure of enhancing learner autonomy, which made students aware of learning processes. Specifically, the instructor provided students with the objectives, contents, timeline, and materials of the course. In the first and second questions, participants were asked whether they had any plans for their study and for pre-reading before class with this provision. All of the eleven participants stated that they could make a plan. For example, Participant 1 stated, *"My plan was to review for the mid-term test one week beforehand"*. As for reading before class, all of the participants acknowledged the role of this activity and had a plan of action. Some participants failed to follow the initial plan due to unexpected events. However, they came up with a new one to complete the task, as stated by Participant 3 *"I turned up half an hour earlier before class time to read."*

Another method used in the third question is 'bridging' to activate the knowledge learned in the previous class to highlight the significance of revising to students (Walqui, 2006). In response, all participants stated their awareness and envisioned a plan for revising. However, only two implemented it every week. The other nine failed from time to time and exhibited a sense of regret as it influenced their lecture comprehension to certain extents. Subsequently, they tried new plans as in *"I figured out a better schedule to*

revise." (Participant 9). It is also recorded that participants employed different strategies for pre-reading and revising, for example, *" I read and took notes, and during the lectures, I edited the notes"* (Participant 2) and *"used AI-generated quizzes to revise"* (Participant 11).

Predicated on the answers, this theme is divided into two categories: (1) the ability to make plans for learning and (2) the ability to identify strategies for learning. These behaviors closely align with the description of what a learner can perform in the first phase of learner autonomy– Learner awareness (Nunan, 1997). Some participants failed to adhere to the initial plans; however, they could flexibly modify their schedules to guarantee task completion and lecture comprehension. Besides, once provided with the resources, learners actively organized them to achieve the stated objectives. This is in line with the reactive autonomy classified by Littlewood (1996). The responses also point out the relationship between teachers' support and learners' ability to set realistic targets and study plans outlined by Little (1991).

Theme 2: Impacts of scaffolding targeted at learner involvement

The course's instructor slightly reduced the extent of scaffolding, shifting decision-making to students to foster Learner involvement, the second level in Nunan's (1997) model. The scaffolding method in use is 'schema building', which involves connecting information and knowledge (Walqui, 2006). The specific context of application is the instructor suggested various note-taking methods for students to select and apply.

Upon answering the fourth question, participants made different choices categorized as (1) building on the given materials, (2) creating mind maps, and (3) using traditional outlines. Six participants decided to use the first option – *"added details and explanations to clearly-structured slides provided by the teacher"* (Participant 3). Two participants selected mind maps because they effectively facilitated their revision, specifically stated by Participant 2 that *"I could easily recall the lesson structure and how information was connected."* The answer from Participant 5 depicted a combination of the first two choices as *"it depends on the characteristics of the knowledge"*. The third option was chosen by the other two participants, which is to *"note down in the form of bullet points, so my notes had main points, supporting ideas, and examples"* (Participant 11).

The results depict that all participants successfully selected a proper method for themselves. Their explanations regarding their choices and implementation strategies suggest that their decisions were not made arbitrarily. Instead, they evaluated all options to figure out which method they preferred or found most effective.

According to Nunan (1997), to progress to the second level of autonomy with more

involvement in taking charge of their learning, learners should be offered a range of alternatives and be able to make their own choices. In this context, appropriate scaffolding facilitated this process, and the data confirmed that participants successfully exercised their decision-making abilities. In addition, the capacity for independent decision-making is identified to be a fundamental characteristic of an autonomous learner, according to Little (1991). This viewpoint also accords with Hunt et al.'s (1989) that learner autonomy equates to the ability to make rational choices and enact them.

Theme 3: Impacts of scaffolding targeted at learner intervention

Following the guidance of Nunan's (1997) model to promote the third level, the instructor reduced control further, enabling students to modify tasks through 'modelling' and 'contextualizing'. As stated by Walqui (2006), students should know what a developing product looks like upon encountering a new task to be able to adapt learned techniques to other tasks. Therefore, the instructor prepared a model answer for students to identify techniques themselves. As for the fifth question, all eleven participants reported '*successfully identifying the technique and adjusting it to other tasks*'. The details of their answers indicated their understanding of a step-by-step analysis. Specifically, Participant 10 mentioned, "*From the model, I think it is important to figure out the roots of the problem.*"

Walqui (2003) highlights that the key impact of contextualizing is to "bring complex ideas closer to the students' world experience" (p.173). In this course, contextualizing was implemented through the teacher's usage of specific examples to simplify abstract theories.

In response to the sixth question, all participants acknowledged the significance of this method and reported applying it throughout the course for different purposes, such as deepening their understanding of abstract theories, revising with peers, and supporting key points in assignments. One example is "*I think examples are important as they reflect the theories most simply. As I learned about the Power Distance Dimension – I used the example of differences in pronouns of Vietnamese and English to illustrate that dimension*" (Participant 2). This means that they internalized contextualizing as a learning strategy and effectively applied it in multiple academic contexts.

Overall, the participants' responses fell into two categories: (1) the ability to adjust the analysis techniques to new scenarios and (2) the ability to generate new examples for other purposes, which are indicative of autonomous learning. To put it simply, participants took ownership of the provided the techniques and actively personalized them. This corresponds to what Nunan describes in the third level in the (1997) five-level model – Learner intervention and to Littlewood's (1996)

proactive autonomy, wherein learners personalize their learning experience.

Theme 4: Impacts of scaffolding targeted at learner creation

To promote the next level of learner autonomy – Learner creation, the instructor used the method of 'developing metacognition' in the summative assessment of the course, allowing students to work in groups and create a topic for their papers. On answering the seventh question, all participants were able to strategically plan for task distribution among team members, for example, *"deciding which parts required more people to write, which parts could be handled by one* (Participant 7) and *"separated parts to certain members as someone would be better at certain tasks"* (Participant 1).

As part of the task is picking one option from two general topics, all of the participants mentioned how they finalized their preferred options, for instance, *"I like option 2 more because I like the more practical and applicable one"* (Participant 11). It is important to note that all of them preferred the idea that they were given choices.

The final step was to generate the final topic. All of the participants agreed on the importance and also the challenge of this task, as Participant 6 noted, *"It is very important to create the right topic for the assignment. A too broad or too narrow topic would be the last thing we wanted."*

To sum up, the responses were classified into (1) planning and identifying teamwork strategies, (2) selecting between two topic options, (3) adapting content, and (4) creating a topic for the report. The data proves that participants exercised all of the actions associated with the first three levels, and the scaffolding used in designing the summative assessment of the course facilitated their progression to level Four in Nunan's (1997) model, which is creating their own work.

Additionally, the behaviors recorded match with descriptions of learner autonomy from different theories. In particular, cooperation as a team to accomplish the task reflects a sense of responsibility, a fundamental characteristic of autonomous learning as stated by Dam (1995) and Benson (2007). Notably, this task fits with Dickinson's description of a learning situation where learners can display their autonomous learning, which is one "in which the learner is responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions" (1987, p.11). The data confirms that all participants were fully in charge of the process of conducting the task, also corresponding to a widely referenced definition by Holec (1981, p.3), which is the "ability to take charge of one's own learning".

Theme 5: Impacts of scaffolding targeted at learner transcendence

The instructor, adopting Steps Eight and Nine in Nunan's (2003) nine-step

procedure to facilitate students to progress to the highest level of learner autonomy, sent out an online learner course feedback form for students' evaluations and suggestions upon the completion of the course. Answering the eighth question, all of the participants praised the usefulness of the course content, highlighting its relevance to their future academic and professional experiences such as studying overseas, working in international organizations and developing cultural awareness. One example is *"the most useful part is Hofstede's cultural dimensions, which provides fundamental knowledge about cultures, which is helpful for me who is expecting to study abroad"* (Participant 2). Besides, eight out of eleven participants could spot an area of interest for further research after the course had finished, such as *"types of non-verbal communication"* (Participant 7). More importantly, four participants were highly aware of the benefits of their research interest, particularly stated by Participant 8 *"love to research more about Hofstede's theory, which has even become my dissertation topic"*.

In response to the ninth question regarding course modifications to enhance learner autonomy, all participants could propose various activities. Three participants expressed the need for additional scaffolding in pre-reading tasks, specifically guided questions to help them address lengthy texts and engage more actively with the materials.

Next, five participants recommended incorporating more group activities namely presentations and role-plays as strategizing as a team can boost self-directed learning behaviors. Two participants suggested submitting a reflection after each class to encourage greater responsibility for revising. Besides, one emphasized the importance of teachers' well-structured materials in promoting self-directed learning as *"important to facilitate my revision and I learned how to take notes from them, too"* (Participant 11).

In summary, the participants' responses to the last two questions are sorted into (1) course evaluation (2) aspects for further research, and (3) suggestions for the addition of new activities. These findings are the manifestations of transcending the classroom border in that the students could make connections between the theories learned and the real world, indicating the highest level of learner autonomy, as described by Nunan (1997). Benson's (2001) three-dimensional model highlights the link between cognitive awareness and increased learner control, which is evident in this study in that the ability to reflect on one's learning and make connections, one important feature in cognitive processes, can enhance learner autonomy. Besides, the detailed explanations of the participants' suggestions indicate an awareness of their own limitations in autonomous learning and capacities to initiate strategies to overcome them.

By adopting teacher perspectives, participants were able to design strategies that cater to their individual learning needs. This shift in mindset fosters a deeper sense of responsibility and ownership. This is in sync with Nunan's (2003) aim when designing one of the highest levels of scaffolding to promote learner autonomy. It also adheres to Benson's (2001) viewpoint that while educators shape the overall curriculum, learners play a significant role in tailoring the content to their needs. Similarly, this role depicts proactive autonomy, as described by Littlewood (1996).

5. Conclusion, Limitation and Suggestions for furthere study

This research explored the relationship between scaffolding and learner autonomy, guided by the question: "To what extent does scaffolding impact the development of learner autonomy in an Intercultural Communication course?". Adopting a case study approach, the study examined the application of scaffolding in an Intercultural Communication course at the English Department of Hanoi University. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eleven participants.

The data illustrate the progression of learner autonomy from lower to higher levels throughout the IC course with the intervention of various scaffolding methods, following Nunan's (1997) model, which advocates for the gradual reduction of teacher support to promote learner independence. Notably, at the highest level, participants exhibited the ability to identify their academic interests for future study and independently research to further develop their intercultural competence. These findings support the notion that scaffolding, when applied appropriately, can indeed enhance the development of learner autonomy.

This study was conducted as a case study utilizing semi-structured interviews as the sole method of data collection, which presents several limitations. First, while the sample of eleven students from an Intercultural Communication course provides valuable insights into the experiences of these participants, its limited size constrains the generalizability of the findings, making them indicative rather than representative. Second, the reliance on a single data collection method may present potential limitations.

Hence, future research could address these limitations by expanding the sample size across Intercultural Communication courses to enhance the generalizability and combining other qualitative data collection methods, such as classroom observations, for greater depth and breadth of the evidence, thereby strengthening the validity of the results.

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