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Empowering EFL Student Teachers with Evidence-Based Practices: Findings from the Teaching Practicum

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Abstract

Embedding evidence-based practices (EBPs) within EFL teacher training has great potential to meet both the needs of quality instruction and student learning achievement. However, implementing these practices during the teaching practicum remains underexplored and underdeveloped, particularly in under-resourced contexts. This research explores how seventy-one EFL student teachers incorporate EBPs in their practicum, analyzing the challenges they encounter and the effects of EBPs on students' learning. The participants were divided into two case study groups: one focused on scaffolded instruction (n = 32) and the other on differentiated instruction (n = 39). Each group received a five-week structured intervention combining theoretical input with strategy modeling, collaborative design tasks, and a Plan–Perform–Reflect cycle to connect theory to practice. A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating survey data with online reflective journals and focus group interviews. Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed and interpreted for each case and collectively across the two cases. Findings indicated that EFL student teachers possess knowledge about EBPs, but inadequate resources, classroom management difficulties, and a lack of effective mentorship constrain their application. The article concludes with recommendations for enhancing EFL teacher training programs and addressing the barriers to EBP implementation.

Introduction

The teaching practicum is an essential component of teacher training which contributes significantly to the development of teachers' professional identity. Connecting theory and practice prepares preservice teachers to engage effectively with evidence-based practices and provides intrinsic motivation to be flexible and make data-driven decisions. Nationwide, in teacher education programs, EBPs are frequently incorporated due to collaboration between universities and schools, research-based training, and mentorship (Maheady et al., 2013; European Commission et al., 2023; AERO, 2023). This transition highlights the importance of evidence-based, practice-based teacher education. Professionalism in teaching involves considering teaching as a profession that is knowledge-based and research-informed and developing reflective teaching professionals (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Evidence-based practice (EBP) is an increasingly prevalent perspective in teacher training that encourages a shift toward research-based decision-making and data-driven teaching approaches (Scheeler et al., 2016).

Evidence-based practices (EBPs) have become essential in English language teaching (ELT). EBPs enhance teaching effectiveness and EFL student achievement. Rooted in empirical research, key EBPs include explicit instruction (Badawi, 2019), scaffolding (Faraj, 2015), task-based learning (Sholeh et al., 2020), collaborative learning (Badr, 2020; Ramadan, 2020), differentiated instruction (Şaban, & Atay, 2023; Tajik et al., 2024), formative assessment (Kaur, & Lim-Ratnam, 2023), and technology-enhanced learning (El-Henawy, 2023), all of which foster structured, engaging, and cognitively demanding language learning. These evidence-based strategies promote effective, student-centered EFL instruction, enhancing both language proficiency and classroom engagement.

Building on this foundation, equipping new EFL teachers to cater to the diverse needs of learners requires innovative and research-based methods. School-based EBPs provide a systematic structure for effective instruction; that is, systematic teaching ensures that instructional methods are empirically validated and tailored to enhance optimal learning for students (Elliott & Treuting, 1991). In the context of EFL teaching, evidence-based practices (EBPs) are especially important due to the unique challenges of language acquisition. Unlike other subjects that build on a student's native language, EFL instruction requires learning an entirely new linguistic system, necessitating

EBPs to help address common challenges such as diverse proficiency levels and limited target language exposure in the classroom.

Despite consensus on their efficacy, the implementation dynamics of EBPs during EFL practicums remain under-examined, particularly in resource-constrained settings. This study addresses this gap by examining how EFL student teachers implement scaffolded and differentiated instruction during their practicum, following training interventions, the challenges they encounter, and the observable impact of these practices on learner engagement and language performance.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the extent to which EFL student teachers implement evidence-based practices (EBPs) during their practicum, following structured training in scaffolded and differentiated instruction. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify the key challenges that hinder the effective implementation of these practices in authentic classroom settings and to explore how each targeted EBP affects student language performance and instructional effectiveness. By examining both the training intervention and subsequent practicum experiences, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how research-informed strategies are integrated within teacher education and their practical implications for enhancing EFL teaching and learning.

Significance of Study

This study contributes to the EFL teacher education literature by examining the experiences of EFL student teachers in Egypt, offering insights into the challenges associated with implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) in resource-constrained contexts. The findings provide valuable implications for teacher education programs, policymakers, and educational institutions seeking to improve EFL instruction through research-informed pedagogical approaches. Furthermore, practical strategies for addressing barriers to EBP implementation are presented, which may guide future educational reforms in Egypt and other settings.

Literature Review

This literature review critically examines evidence-based practices (EBPs) in education through three interconnected lenses: conceptual foundations exploring how EBPs integrate empirical research with professional expertise; teacher education programs' approaches to developing EBP implementation through curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development; and specific applications in EFL contexts where research-informed strategies enhance language acquisition, engagement, and communicative competence. The analysis reveals both the transformative potential and implementation challenges of EBPs across these educational domains.

Defining Evidence-Based Practices in Education

Though originally rooted in medicine, EBPs have become integral in education, aiming to bridge the gap between research and teaching practice (Sciuchetti et al., 2016). Throughout the last 20 years, evidence-based practice (EBP) has developed as a framework for incorporating research findings into clinical practice, while also considering the client's needs, values, preferences, and the clinician's professional expertise (Drisko, & Grady, 2015). Davies (1999), an early advocate of evidence-based teaching (EBT), contended that EBT is not a fixed set of rules but rather a flexible framework designed to support and enhance a teacher's professional expertise. Davies defines EBT as "a set of principles and practices which form the basis upon which practitioners make professional judgments and deploy their expertise" (p. 118). Dixon and Verenikina (2020) agree with Cook and Odom (2013) that evidence-based practices (EBP) refer to programs and approaches proven through rigorous research to improve student outcomes and promote evidence-driven decision-making among professionals.

Highlighting the criteria for identifying EBPs, Cook et al. (2018) describe EBPs as strategies designed to improve student outcomes based on rigorous standards in research design, quality, and effect size. Cook et al. (2012) categorize instructional practices based on their research support: (1) *Best Practices* rely on expert opinion or personal experience but lack strong research backing; (2) *Research-Based Practices* draw from some research, though often limited in quality or quantity; (3) *Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)* are rigorously validated by high-quality, replicated studies, consistently demonstrating effective outcomes; and (4) *Effective Practices* produce

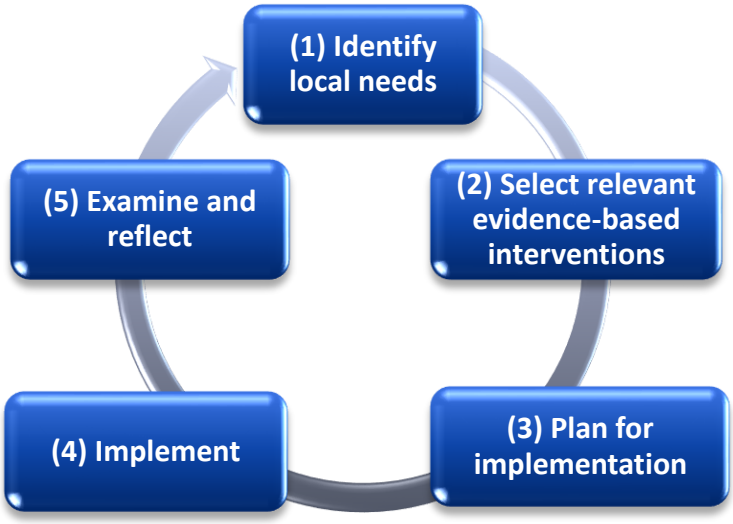
positive results for most students but may not yet qualify as EBPs due to insufficient research. Chorzempa et al. (2019) emphasize the distinction between these terms, noting that EBPs are supported by rigorous, replicated research, whereas research-based practices and best practices lack the same level of validation, relying instead on limited studies or anecdotal evidence.

Cook and Odom (2013) note that, unlike earlier approaches such as best or research-based practices, evidence-based practices (EBPs) must meet strict, predefined standards for research *design*, *quality*, and *quantity*. Typically, EBPs require multiple high-quality experimental or quasi-experimental studies, including single-case research, to demonstrate significant student outcomes. Cook et al. (2012) add that EBPs rely on *experimental designs*, including randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and single-case designs, with *quality indicators of methodological rigor* such as minimal attrition, valid outcomes, group equivalence, and fidelity of implementation to ensure effectiveness and bridge research and practice to improve student outcomes. Additionally, Hornby et al. (2013) emphasize that evidence for interventions comes from various sources, including individual studies, reviews, meta-analyses, and research syntheses, with repositories like the What Works Clearinghouse (U.S.) and the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information Centre (U.K.).

Furthermore, William (2019) highlights the essential role of context in assessing educational research and offers four questions for stakeholders to consider: (1) Is it a relevant problem, recognizing that strategies that work in one context may not work in another? (2) What is the magnitude of improvements that can be obtained, excluding lab-perfect to reality? (3) What are the costs, considering that even modest gains can be worthwhile if affordable? (4) will the approach work in the specific local context, factoring in elements like teacher quality? He argues that the crucial question is not merely "What works?" but "What works in this context?" to ensure research findings are applied effectively and appropriately. Considering the steps of evidence-based practice, the U.S. Department of Education (2023) recommends a cycle of ongoing enhancement to improve learner outcomes and maximize the impact of educational investments. This process includes (1) assessing local needs, particularly those of the learner population being served; (2) selecting evidence-based project components that organizations can effectively implement; (3) developing a strategic implementation plan; (4) executing, supporting, and refining the project components; and (5) evaluating and reflecting on their effectiveness. Figure 1 represents the evidence-based cycle.

Figure 1

The evidence-based decision-making cycle (U.S. Department of Education, 2023, p. 4)



To effectively use evidence to inform their instructional decisions for students, teachers need to consider all three factors contained in EBP: a critical appraisal of research-based evidence, reflection on their own teaching experiences to assess its applicability, and consideration of the context of their students' needs, perspectives, and priorities. Drisko and Grady (2019) contend that evidence-based practices are a means for evidence-informed decision-making that transcends a sole reliance on research but also integrates client values and preferences, as well as professional expertise. In social work, EBP has been defined as a process that involves posing a question introduced by a client or community need, formulating a researchable question, finding relevant evidence, assessing the evidence for validity, applying it in practice, and evaluating the practice for effectiveness and efficiency. Similarly, in education, effective implementation of EBP requires aligning students' needs, values, and preferences with teachers' professional expertise. Malin et al. (2020) highlight that adopting an evidence-based approach to teaching requires integrating teachers' experiential knowledge with contextual and practical interpretations of research, along with a reflective approach to teaching practice. Figure 2 represents the three core elements of EBPs.

Figure 2

Components of Evidence-Based Practice (adapted from Siegel et al, 2023, p.905).

Torres et al. (2012) propose a ten-step model for implementing evidence-based practices (see figure 3), including: (1) assessing needs by identifying the characteristics of students, teachers, and the educational context; (2) searching for EBPs using authoritative sources such as the What Works Clearinghouse and the Best Evidence Encyclopedia; (3) selecting the most appropriate and practical intervention based on contextual relevance; (4) identifying the essential components of the chosen EBP to ensure fidelity in implementation; (5) establishing foundational conditions within the instructional environment to support effective delivery and avoid compromising the intervention's impact; (6) implementing the EBP with fidelity, using tools such as checklists, observations, and data collection to maintain adherence; (7) monitoring progress through ongoing evaluation of student outcomes to assess effectiveness; (8) adapting the intervention as needed to better fit the teaching context while preserving its core elements; (9) using data-driven instructional decisions to promote continuous improvement; and (10) advocating for the EBP by sharing evidence of its effectiveness to encourage broader adoption among educators.

Figure 3

Implementing Evidence-Based Practices in Education (original)

Note: This figure illustrates Torres et al.'s (2012) structured approach to implementing Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs), organized into Labuschagne et al.'s (2023, p. 693) five domains for initiating and maintaining simulation-based training in healthcare education: Why, Who, How, What, and So.

Evidence-Based Practices in Teacher Education

The practicum is essential for equipping pre-service teachers with instructional skills, fostering professional growth, and preparing them to meet diverse student needs (Li, & Peng, 2024; Qazi et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2023). Clinically rich teacher preparation bridges theory and practice by providing authentic opportunities to apply empirically supported interventions (Emerson et al., 2018; Henry et al.,2017; Smith & Griffith, 2024). Integrating research-based coursework with hands-on field experiences enables the application of evidence-based practices (EBPs), which support informed decision-making, self-awareness, and adaptability in varied educational contexts (Scheeler et al., 2016; Szocik et al., 2024). This approach deepens pre-service teachers' understanding of EBPs, enhances their ability to address students' diverse needs, and fosters innovation and adaptability in dynamic educational settings (Chorzempa et al., 2019; Cook et al., 2018; Dixon, & Verenikina, 2020; Jones, 2009).

A global trend in education is the growing emphasis on empowering accreditation standards with bodies of evidence-based practice to improve teacher professionalism and student outcomes. Diery et al. (2021) argue that current reforms in teacher education, which emphasize professional standards, increasingly position evidence-based practice as a central component of teachers' ongoing professional learning. Hornby et al. (2013) and Scheeler et al. (2016) highlight a global shift in university-based teacher education toward alternative pathways that strengthen university-school collaborations through internships and experiential learning. These initiatives bridge theory and practice by integrating academic knowledge with practical application, supported by reflective practices, in authentic teaching environments. Maheady et al. (2013) assure that key stakeholders, including the U.S. Congress, the Department of Education, and accreditation bodies such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), have prioritized EBP in education reform.

Georgiou et al. (2020) note that the European Commission set principles for teacher competencies to guide reforms, focusing on research and evidence-based practices to promote innovation and expand knowledge. The European Commission highlights the need for adaptable, evidence-informed teaching practices through: (1) fostering innovation and critical thinking in educators (European Commission, 2012); (2) supporting professional development with coaching, expert guidance, and sustained learning (European Commission, & Vuorikari, 2018); (3) investing

in research skills to bridge research and practice (European Commission et al., 2023); and (4) promoting evidence-informed approaches that balance research with professional experience and contextual factors (Council of the European Union, 2024). Likely, Böttcher-Oschmann et al. (2021) highlight that evidence-based practice (EBP) became central to German teacher education in the 2000s, mandated by national standards. Training includes bachelor's and master's programs to prepare students as evidence-based practitioners through school-based traineeships.

In a parallel initiative in Australia, the 2018 *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* advocated for evidence-based practices and proposed a National Evidence Research Institute to restore Australia's global education leadership that was established in 2020 to translate research into practical guidance for educators and policymakers, advancing evidence-based education (Rogers, 2022). The Australian Education Research Organization (AERO) (2023) emphasizes integrating evidence-based practices into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) through: (1) evidence-based core content focusing on pedagogical knowledge and practice-based learning, (2) assessments linking theory to practice, such as simulations and portfolios, and (3) strong partnerships between ITE providers and schools to enhance training through mentorship and clinical methods.

Highly effective teacher professional learning combines professional expertise and experience with thoughtful engagement in research and evidence-based practices. Agbenyega et al. (2022) point out that evidence-informed practice is a shift from relying solely on personal experience or prevailing opinions, focusing instead on using reliable evidence to develop teaching strategies that effectively address student needs, support informed decision-making, and cultivate a growth mindset through school-based research and ongoing professional development. Sims et al. (2023) argue that effective teacher professional development should prioritize four core elements to facilitate sustainable improvements in teaching practice including (1) *Insight* fostering a comprehensive understanding of fundamental teaching and learning principles; (2) *Motivation* by encouraging educators to translate these insights into actionable improvements in their instructional practices; (3) *Techniques* through providing teachers with evidence-based strategies; and (4) *Practice* to ensure the consistent application of these techniques through their integration into routine instructional activities.

Drisko and Grady (2019) emphasize that teaching evidence-based practice (EBP) involves incorporating advanced research skills, critical thinking, and effective communication into educational settings. This includes evaluating systematic reviews, interpreting research, documenting EBP, and recognizing its impact on policy, administration, and supervision. Similarly, Böttcher-Oschmann et al. (2021) define EBP competencies as either using research (engagement with research) or establishing research (engagement in research). Using research focuses on applying evidence in teaching by locating, evaluating, and using systematic sources, while establishing research involves designing and conducting studies, analyzing data, and interpreting results through a structured process. Essential skills include literature review, research methods, findings interpretation, communication, and research design knowledge. Together, these competencies enable educators to integrate evidence into practice and actively contribute to research. Investigating the implementation of research-based learning (RBL) courses in teacher education in Germany, Brew and Saunders (2020) found that teacher educators hold divergent perspectives on RBL, often shaped by their own research experiences. While some emphasize critical reflection and inquiry-based learning, others prioritize practitioner research for classroom improvement. The study highlights the lack of a unified conceptual framework for RBL and underscores the need for clearer pedagogical guidelines and targeted professional development to enhance its effectiveness.

Accordingly, a shift toward *practice-based evidence* (PBE) is recommended to bridge research and practice. PBE involves collecting real-world classroom data to evaluate and adapt both EBPs and experiential practices (Chorzempa et al., 2019). This process helps validate practices within specific educational contexts, supporting data-driven decision-making. Cook et al. (2018) suggest three strategies to enhance EBP implementation: demonstrating local effectiveness, balancing flexibility with fidelity, and promoting practical research inspired by real-world use. Several studies examined various approaches for incorporating EBPs in teacher education. Darling-Hammond (2017) emphasized improving clinical preparation for teachers through evidence-based clinical practice, utilizing an inquiry-based approach and coaching. Szocik et al. (2024) stressed fostering preservice teachers' autonomy in implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) through hands-on preparation and reflective practice. Bloomfield et al. (2024) advocated cost-effective strategies like goal setting, peer coaching, and team meetings to enhance

school-wide EBP adoption. In the same vein, Scheeler et al. (2016) and Rakap and Balikci (2023) highlight the importance of hands-on practice during teacher training, as theoretical knowledge alone does not guarantee the consistent application of EBPs in classrooms. To address this, teacher education programs must provide preservice teachers with field-based experiences, performance feedback, and implementation support.

Likely, Kretlow and Bartholomew (2010) examined how peer coaching affects both preservice and in-service teachers' use of empirically supported interventions. They found that coaching consistently improved teachers' fidelity in implementing evidence-based practices (e.g., Class Wide Peer Tutoring, Direct Instruction, Positive Behavior Support) and identified essential coaching components: engaging small-group training, follow-up observations, and performance-based feedback. They recommended integrating coaching into teacher preparation programs and concluded it is a promising approach to ensuring that empirically supported interventions are successfully applied in actual classrooms. In Germany, Böttcher-Oschmann et al. (2021) highlighted that research-learning projects (RLP) help thirty-six student teachers develop competencies in evidence-based practice (EBP). These competencies are categorized into two areas: *using research*, which involves applying evidence to address teaching challenges, and *conducting research*, which requires independently investigating a research question using appropriate methods. RLPs were incorporated into a university course in parallel with their seven-month internship. The course is structured into three phases: *(1) preparation* for learning research fundamentals, forming groups, conducting literature reviews, and designing research, *(Focus: Content Knowledge, Research Methods)*; *(2) fieldwork* for implementing research, analyzing data, and receiving coaching, *(Focus: Methodological Skills, Research Reflection)*; and *(3) presentation* through creating and presenting scientific posters, *(Focus: Communication Skills)*. It was also noted that cognitive modeling, scaffolding, and coaching helped prospective teachers effectively adopt the strategies they have been taught.

In Arab countries, research on evidence-based practices (EBPs) in teacher education remains limited. Alatifi et al. (2023) examined the attitudes, knowledge, and application of evidence-based practices (EBPs) among early intervention professionals in Saudi Arabia. The study reported greater use of EBPs compared to emerging and unsupported practices. However, the most common sources of information were colleagues, workplace training, and general web searches, while

research literature was among the least accessed sources. Factors influencing EBP adoption included knowledge levels, institutional requirements, and school location (major cities vs. other regions). The study highlights the need for improved knowledge dissemination and training to bridge the gap between research and practice. Mohamed et al. (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine Arabic language teachers' perceptions and implementation of EBPs in teaching students with learning disabilities (LD) in the UAE. The findings indicate that teachers generally hold positive beliefs about EBPs and frequently utilize direct instruction, assistive technology, differentiated instruction, and diagnostic assessments. However, EBP implementation varies based on gender, education level, and access to training opportunities. The study highlights the need for professional development, institutional support, and collaboration with special education teachers to optimize the effective integration of EBPs in inclusive classrooms.

Evidence-Based Practices in EFL Education

Evidence-based practices (EBPs) are essential in EFL education, as they professionalize language instruction, enhance teaching effectiveness, and promote student language learning outcomes across language skills (Alsowat, 2020). However, research in foreign language education often lacks methodological rigor, while instruction remains primarily driven by experience (Liu, 2017). Meta-analyses of rigorously designed and conducted randomized controlled trials (RCTs) offer the highest standard of empirical evidence, providing robust and reliable conclusions for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions across diverse contexts (Acton, 2001; McNamara & Scales Jr., 2011). Sato and Loewen (2019) emphasize the importance of sustained research-pedagogy dialogue, advocating for the accessibility and practical application of Instructed Second Language Acquisition (ISLA) research to enhance instructional methodologies. Drawing on empirical studies, they demonstrate the effectiveness of approaches such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Form-Focused Instruction (FFI), Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), and Peer Interaction, emphasizing their impact on linguistic accuracy, fluency, learner engagement, and self-regulated learning. Additionally, they underscore the importance of collaboration between researchers and educators, promoting research-informed teaching practices while ensuring that findings remain practical, accessible, and adaptable to diverse educational contexts.

Exploring evidence-based reading instruction, Cho et al. (2021) conducted a multilevel meta-analysis of 28 studies (published between 2008 and 2018) that examined reading interventions for English Language Learners (ELLs). Their findings indicate that strategy-based instruction, which incorporates activating background knowledge, clarifying vocabulary, and utilizing visuals and gestures, is more effective than peer tutoring or computer-based learning. Investigating evidence-based writing instruction, Graham et al. (2024) conducted a meta-analysis of 148 studies involving 22,838 students to examine effective writing instruction practices for students in grades 6–12. The findings indicate that Self-Regulated Strategy Development, the Process Approach to Writing, and Strategy Instruction yielded the most significant improvements in writing outcomes. Peer assistance, transcription instruction, feedback, and pre-writing activities also demonstrated positive effects. In contrast, computer-assisted instruction showed minimal impact. In tandem with this, Alsowat's (2020) meta-analysis revealed that key evidence-based practices in EFL include explicit instruction, scaffolding, collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, task-based language learning, and formative assessment and feedback, all of which aim to improve language proficiency through structured, engaging, and cognitively demanding activities.

Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI): It is an instructional approach that equips learners with cognitive (e.g., summarizing, predicting), metacognitive (e.g., planning, monitoring, evaluating), and social/affective (e.g., seeking help, self-reinforcement) strategies to enhance language acquisition. Metacognitive strategy training, a core component of SBI, emphasizes teaching learners to regulate their learning processes through planning, monitoring, and evaluation, fostering self-regulation and autonomy. Research indicates that SBI enhances language proficiency by enabling learners to adopt effective learning strategies and develop greater autonomy. A meta-analysis by Alsowat (2020) found that strategy instruction had a moderate effect on overall language proficiency, with the greatest impact on speaking skills. El-Henawy (2019) found that training EFL teachers on cognitive strategy instruction (CSI) improved EFL reading and writing instruction and enhanced students' performance. The training centered on two key instructional models: Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) for reading and Self-Regulated Strategies Development (SRSD) for writing, both of which align with the metacognitive and cognitive components of SBI. These findings further reinforce the importance of teacher professional

development in implementing evidence-based language instruction strategies. Dalman and Plonsky (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of 45 studies on second language (L2) listening strategy instruction (SI), finding a moderate overall effect on L2 listening comprehension. Findings indicated that learners in foreign language settings benefited more than those in second language environments, and older or postsecondary learners showed greater gains due to their advanced cognitive and metacognitive abilities. The study highlighted the importance of integrating SI into L2 curricula and calls for further research on optimal instructional strategies. Additionally, a review by Monika and Devi (2022) demonstrated that metacognitive strategies significantly improve learner engagement, comprehension, and autonomy, particularly in blended learning environments. Empirical studies further support the role of metacognitive strategy training in promoting self-regulated learning, ultimately contributing to long-term language proficiency and academic success.

Explicit Instruction: It is a structured and systematic approach to language teaching that directly introduces and clearly explains linguistic rules, structures, and patterns, followed by guided practice to reinforce learning (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Unlike implicit learning, which relies on subconscious language acquisition, explicit instruction systematically teaches grammar, vocabulary, and complex structures that are difficult to acquire through exposure alone. This method is particularly effective for grammar, vocabulary, and other fundamental language components, ensuring learners receive clear, guided explanations and practice opportunities. Maeng (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of 40 studies comparing explicit (EI) and implicit instruction (II) in Korean English classrooms, finding that EI is significantly more effective, particularly for grammar and vocabulary acquisition. Its advantage was most evident in high school and university settings, though no significant differences were found based on L2 proficiency, instructional duration, or outcome measures. The study suggested that EI's structured approach makes it superior for cognitive development, while II may still benefit pragmatic skills and pronunciation. Buckingham et al. (2019) emphasized that systematic and explicit phonics instruction is essential for early literacy development, significantly improving reading outcomes compared to unsystematic methods. Synthetic phonics, which explicitly teaches letter-sound relationships and blending skills, is particularly effective. Early intervention is crucial, and phonics should be integrated with phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension as part of

a comprehensive literacy program. A meta-analysis by Alsowat (2020) found that explicit instruction had a medium effect on overall language learning outcomes, with the strongest impact on grammar acquisition. Additional research highlights its role in enhancing learners' understanding and application of grammatical structures (Alqaed, 2023). Donegan and Fluhler (2024) highlighted the importance of explicit instruction in strengthening reading interventions, particularly for struggling readers. They emphasized making instruction systematic, individualized, and scaffolded, using data-based individualization (DBI) to tailor support. The study suggested that prioritizing explicit teaching strategies can improve reading outcomes more effectively than simply increasing intervention time. Zhang and Yuan (2020) found that explicit pronunciation instruction (PI) on L2 pronunciation development, particularly suprasegmental instruction, led to greater gains in comprehensibility, especially in spontaneous speech, with improvements maintained over time among Chinese undergraduate students.

Scaffolded Instruction: It provides temporary, structured support to learners as they acquire new linguistic concepts or perform tasks beyond their current abilities, gradually reducing assistance as their proficiency develops. This instructional strategy is rooted in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), enabling learners to build on prior knowledge and gain independence. In EFL, scaffolding involves three stages: modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. Studies by Chappell (2014) and Gibbons (2015) have demonstrated its effectiveness in developing academic language and improving writing skills through techniques such as visual aids and structured sentence frames. Tajeddin et al. (2020) examined scaffolding in content-based instruction and found that it significantly enhanced learners' comprehension and overall learning outcomes. Jamali Kivi et al. (2021) investigated the impact of teacher- and peer-scaffolding on incidental vocabulary learning and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners. The study found that peer scaffolding was more effective while both methods improved learning outcomes. The findings emphasize the importance of interactive learning and suggest integrating peer-based scaffolding into EFL instruction. Awadelkarim (2021) explored EFL instructors' perceptions of scaffolding at Majmaah University, finding that while teachers view scaffolding positively, many lack theoretical and practical knowledge for effective implementation. The study highlighted the need for professional development to enhance instructors' ability to apply scaffolding strategies systematically in EFL teaching.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT): It emphasizes authentic, real-world tasks to facilitate meaningful language use. By prioritizing communicative competence over rote memorization, TBLT fosters active engagement and problem-solving in language acquisition (Ellis, 2003). It involves three phases: pre-task (introducing the topic), task cycle (completing the task), and post-task (reflection and feedback) (Willis & Willis, 2007). Research shows TBLT improves fluency and accuracy by encouraging active participation and simulating authentic communication, making it particularly effective in EFL contexts (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). A systematic review by Mudinillah et al. (2024) concluded that TBLT effectively enhances language acquisition, particularly in speaking and listening skills, while promoting learner autonomy. Bryfonski and McKay (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of 52 studies on TBLT, finding it significantly improves L2 learning outcomes and is widely accepted by students, teachers, and administrators. The study supported the integration of TBLT into curricula and teacher training, emphasizing the need for further research on its long-term implementation and adaptability. The meta-analysis by Fernández (2021) confirmed that TBLT significantly improved L2 speaking skills, especially through task repetition and pre-task planning, which enhance complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Peer scaffolding and multimedia-supported TBLT enhance interaction and negotiation of meaning, with the best results observed in intermediate learners. The meta-analysis by Oraif (2022) indicated that TBLT significantly improved EFL learners' speaking skills. The study emphasized task design, teacher roles, and learner engagement as key success factors and recommended further research across different educational levels. Overall, TBLT proves to be a highly effective and engaging method for enhancing real-world communication skills.

Collaborative Learning: It involves students working together in groups to complete tasks that facilitate language development, fostering communication skills, fluency, and critical thinking in an interactive setting (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). In EFL classrooms, it encourages meaningful communication as learners use English to negotiate meaning and co-construct knowledge, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism. Activities such as group discussions and peer teaching provide opportunities for authentic language use. Research indicates that collaborative learning enhances language complexity and accuracy (Storch, 2011), reduces anxiety, and fosters a supportive classroom community, thereby improving critical thinking and problem-solving skills. A study by Vega-Abarzúa et al. (2022) demonstrated that collaborative learning significantly

increased student engagement and participation in EFL classrooms. Cole (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of 28 experimental and quasi-experimental studies to evaluate the effectiveness of peer-mediated learning (e.g., cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and peer tutoring) in improving literacy outcomes for English Language Learners (ELLs). The findings indicate that peer-mediated learning is significantly more effective than teacher-centered or individualized instruction. Additionally, word-level literacy skills improved more than text-level comprehension. The study suggested that integrating peer-mediated learning with structured instructional strategies enhances effectiveness and should be considered a fundamental component of ELL literacy instruction. The meta-analysis by Tang et al. (2021) revealed that cooperative, collaborative, and peer-tutoring (CCP) strategies enhance reading comprehension, fluency, and phonemic awareness in elementary English learners (ELs). Alzubi et al. (2024) reported significant gains in English proficiency, teamwork, peer learning, and social intelligence among EFL university students in Saudi Arabia who participated in collaborative learning environments compared to those in traditional classrooms. Furthermore, teacher interviews highlighted the effectiveness of group projects, discussions, debates, role-playing, and teacher facilitation in enhancing language development and fostering social engagement. The meta-analysis by Elabdali (2021) examined 33 studies on collaborative writing (CW) in L2 learning, finding that CW improves accuracy and rubric scores. However, its effects on fluency and complexity remain inconclusive. The study calls for further research on long-term impacts and instructional design.

Differentiated Instruction: It tailors teaching strategies, materials, assessments, and classroom environments to address the diverse needs of learners, recognizing variations in language proficiency, learning styles, abilities, and interests (Tomlinson, 2014). Key techniques include tiered assignments (tasks at varying complexity levels), flexible grouping (working with peers of similar needs), and choice boards (tasks aligned with interests). Gregory and Chapman (2012) note that differentiation creates a personalized, engaging learning environment. In EFL contexts, it ensures that all students are appropriately challenged. Groenewald et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on Differentiated Instruction (DI), finding significant positive effects on academic achievement, critical thinking, and subject-specific competencies, with high school seniors benefiting the most. Suprayogi et al. (2017) found that differentiation enhanced reading comprehension and vocabulary among Indonesian EFL learners,

promoting inclusivity and effective language learning. A systematic review and meta-analysis by AM et al. (2023) confirmed that differentiated instruction significantly improved student learning outcomes across various educational contexts. Puzio et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 18 studies (25 study cohorts) to evaluate the effectiveness of Tier 1 differentiated literacy instruction in elementary education. The findings indicate a positive impact on literacy achievement, with letter-word reading and writing showing the greatest gains. The study distinguished between designed differentiation (planned instructional adaptations) and interactional differentiation (teacher-initiated adjustments) while examining various approaches, including individualized learning, student choice, and alternative curricula. The study concluded that differentiated literacy instruction is an effective, evidence-based practice. However, it also highlights the need for increased teacher support, additional research on best practices, and structured implementation strategies. Ojong's comprehensive review (2023) explored the effectiveness of Differentiated Instruction (DI) in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), highlighting its ability to tailor content, process, product, and learning environment to meet the diverse needs of learners. DI enhanced motivation, engagement, and achievement, fostering inclusive and personalized learning. However, research on its application in SLA remains limited and fragmented, with challenges such as teacher training, resource constraints, and classroom management. The study emphasized the need for empirical research, professional development, and structured implementation strategies to maximize the effectiveness of DI in multicultural language classrooms.

Formative Assessment and Feedback: It is an ongoing process that evaluates student progress during instruction, providing immediate and constructive feedback to guide learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Unlike summative assessment, which measures learning at the end of a course, formative assessment helps teachers and students monitor progress, identify areas for improvement, and refine their language skills through iterative learning cycles. In EFL contexts, it enhances language proficiency by promoting accuracy and fluency. Ellis (2009) found that corrective feedback during oral tasks improved grammatical accuracy, while Brookhart (2017) emphasized the value of clear, actionable feedback in fostering self-reflection and continuous improvement. López (2023) found that effective classroom feedback significantly enhanced language development in ESL learners. Similarly, a review by Burner (2023) highlights the crucial

role of formative assessment in fostering student-centered learning and adaptive instruction. Brown's meta-analysis study (2021) explores corrective feedback (CF) in second language learning, revealing that CF is more effective for grammar and pronunciation than vocabulary, with oral feedback proving more beneficial than written feedback. Factors such as learner age, instructional context, and type of feedback significantly impact its effectiveness. The meta-analysis by Lv et al. (2021) examined the impact of online feedback on writing complexity, accuracy, and fluency, finding that online teacher feedback was the most effective, followed by online peer feedback and automated feedback. Xuan et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of 48 studies on formative assessment (FA) in K-12 reading achievement, finding a modest positive effect. Teacher-student collaborative assessments and formative assessments (FA) were more effective when integrated with differentiated instruction. The study highlights the need for context-specific implementation of FA and further research on its long-term effects. Zhu (2023) explored formative assessment (FA) in English learning, highlighting its role in providing feedback and improving instruction. While FA enhances learning, challenges such as teacher knowledge gaps and implementation difficulties limit its effectiveness. The study emphasizes the need for teacher training and institutional support to maximize the impact of FA. Zhang et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review of formative assessment (FA) in K-12 EFL education, finding that it improves teaching and learning but faces challenges such as teacher training gaps and cultural constraints. The study highlights the need for professional development to enhance the implementation and effectivenessof FA.

Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL): It integrates digital tools (e.g., apps, online platforms, multimedia) to enrich language learning, promote engagement, and foster learner autonomy and authentic language interaction. Practical applications of Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) play a significant role in EFL education, including blended learning models, flipped learning (FL) pedagogy, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), digital game-based learning (DGBL), gamified instruction, AI-assisted writing tools, and immersive virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) environments. Such applications contribute to a pedagogically sound and cognitively enriching EFL learning experience. A bibliometric analysis by Hasumi and Chiu (2024) highlighted TEL's growing prominence, particularly in improving writing skills. A systematic review by Zainuddin (2023) also found TEL effective in fostering active learning and

linguistic competence. Using a mixed-methods approach, El-Henawy (2023) found that Online Flipped Learning (OFL), supported by scaffolding and digital badges, significantly enhanced the deep reading comprehension and engagement of EFL students. The study highlighted the effectiveness of technology-enhanced instruction and recommended further research on digital tools in EFL reading education. Marzuki et al. (2023) found that AI-driven writing tools, such as Quillbot and ChatGPT, significantly enhanced students' writing quality, particularly in content development and organizational coherence. Hao et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of 45 studies on technology-assisted vocabulary learning for EFL learners, finding a significant positive effect over traditional methods, particularly for long-term retention. Mobile-based learning and out-of-class instruction were more effective than classroom-based approaches, while non-game-based tools (e.g., flashcards, multimedia glosses) outperformed digital games. Productive vocabulary tasks (e.g., word writing) also yielded better outcomes than receptive tasks. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating structured digital tools to enhance vocabulary learning and retention in EFL instruction. Rahmati et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of 67 studies (2009–2020) to evaluate the effectiveness of educational technology in English language teaching (ELT), revealing that technology significantly enhances language learning outcomes, with computer-assisted language learning (CALL) tools proving more effective than traditional methods. The results suggest that integrating ICT tools, mobile applications, and digital resources improves student engagement, autonomy, and efficiency. While educational technology is highly beneficial, the study emphasizes the need for further research on optimal implementation strategies, teacher training, and long-term effects on language proficiency.

This review of research on evidence-based practices (EBPs) in teacher education and EFL instruction yields several key conclusions. High-quality initial teacher education programs play a crucial role in enhancing teaching effectiveness by integrating EBPs and bridging theory with practice through structured coursework and practical training. However, existing research has predominantly focused on special education teachers and in-service training, with less attention given to preservice general education teachers. Despite the demonstrated benefits of EBPs for second language learners, their adoption in classroom settings remains limited. While training increases teachers' awareness of EBPs, their practical application is often hindered by constraints related to curriculum design, learner diversity, and assessment practices.

Furthermore, challenges such as inadequate teacher preparation, varied classroom contexts, and ambiguity regarding optimal instructional methods persist in hindering the effective implementation of EBPs in English language teaching. Although substantial research on EBPs originates from Anglo-American contexts, there is a notable scarcity of studies examining their development and impact in the Arab region, particularly in Egypt. This gap underscores the need for further investigation and documentation of evidence-informed practices to enhance educational outcomes in EFL settings.

Context of the problem

Evidence-based practices (EBPs) have been widely recognized for their potential to enhance educational outcomes, particularly in fostering student engagement and language proficiency (Chappell, 2014; Gibbons, 2015; Tomlinson, 2014). In the context of initial teacher education (ITE), integrating EBPs is essential for bridging the gap between pedagogical theory and classroom practice. Despite this, the implementation of EBPs within teaching practicums, especially in resource-constrained settings, remains inconsistent (Farrell, 2016). In Egypt, this challenge is particularly pronounced. Student teachers often face overcrowded classrooms, rigid and exam-oriented curricula, insufficient teaching materials, and limited mentorship (UNESCO, 2019; World Bank, 2020). These factors limit their ability to apply Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) effectively during practicum experiences. Consequently, many continue to rely on traditional, teacher-centered approaches such as rote memorization and grammar-translation methods, which are inadequate for developing students' communicative competence and language fluency (Abdelhafez, 2010).

While international ITE programs increasingly emphasize Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) to develop preservice teachers' practical skills, there is a paucity of research exploring their application in Egyptian teacher preparation programs. Existing studies have largely focused on Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) in clinical social work education and school social work settings (Abdelaal, 2021; Khalaf, 2022; Moubark, 2018), leaving a significant gap in the literature concerning EBPs in language education practicums. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no prior studies have systematically examined the integration of EBPs, such as scaffolded and differentiated instruction, within the teaching practicum in the Egyptian English as a Foreign

Language (EFL) context. Egypt's national educational reform agenda, embodied in "Egypt Vision 2030," has prioritized the development of high-quality and inclusive education. In response, the Ministry of Higher Education has restructured teacher preparation programs to align with global standards, emphasizing interdisciplinary curricula, performance-based instruction, and clinically rich practicums (Committee for the Educational Studies Sector, The Egyptian Supreme Council of Universities, 2023a, 2023b, 2024). These reforms have expanded the duration and scope of practical training, introducing phases such as microteaching, structured school visits, and extended internships involving action research projects.

Despite these structural improvements, the practical application of EBPs during the practicum remains underexplored and underutilized. Egyptian student teachers often enter the practicum with strong theoretical backgrounds but limited classroom experience. This theory-practice divide can undermine both the quality of instruction and the confidence of novice teachers, who may feel ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of diverse classroom environments. This study aims to address a critical gap by examining how EFL student teachers implement EBPs, specifically scaffolded and differentiated instruction, during their teaching practicum. It examines the challenges they face, the contextual factors that influence their pedagogical choices, and the perceived impact of EBPs on instructional effectiveness and student learning outcomes. By situating the investigation within the context of recent national reforms and international best practices, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) can be meaningfully integrated into teacher preparation programs in low-resource settings.

Therefore, this study investigates how EFL student teachers incorporate evidence-based practices (EBPs) into their teaching practicum, with a particular focus on two instructional approaches: scaffolded instruction and differentiated instruction. Through an analysis of two case studies, the research aims to address the following questions:

1. How do EFL student teachers implement selected EBPs (scaffolded or differentiated instruction) during their teaching practicum?
2. What challenges do EFL student teachers encounter in applying these selected EBPs?
3. How do these selected EBPs influence school student learning outcomes?

By exploring these questions, the study aims to identify the barriers and facilitators of EBP implementation in EFL settings and to offer recommendations for improving teacher training programs, particularly in under-resourced environments.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods multiple case study design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of how EFL student teachers incorporate evidence-based practices (EBPs) during their teaching practicum. Conceptualizing each participating group as a case, this approach allows for triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of findings (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Quantitative data were gathered through surveys to assess student teachers' familiarity with and self-reported application of scaffolded and differentiated instruction. Qualitative data, including reflective journals and focus group interviews, provided deeper insights into the practical implementation of these strategies, the challenges encountered, and their impact on student learning outcomes.

Participants

The study was conducted at Port Said University's Faculty of Education, involving 71 EFL student teachers. For in-depth analysis, the participants were divided into two groups: Group A, comprising 32 student teachers implementing scaffolded instruction, and Group B, consisting of 39 student teachers applying differentiated instruction. Before their practicum, participants completed coursework in pedagogy, language learning, and teaching methods. The practicum, their first significant classroom experience, spans four semesters and is integrated with theoretical instruction. Each semester, trainees participate in eight individual school days, followed by an intensive practicum week, primarily in public schools. This hands-on training enables them to refine their teaching techniques through lesson recordings and feedback from students, peers, and supervisors.

The EFL practicum and related courses follow a structured progression, blending theoretical foundations with practical application. Early semesters focus on curriculum design, teaching

principles, and microteaching, while later stages emphasize teaching methodologies, special needs education, and extended practicum experiences. Participants were purposively selected to ensure exposure to evidence-based practices (EBPs) and a diverse range of academic performance. For all, the practicum served as their first substantial opportunity to manage a classroom and implement teaching strategies, as they had minimal prior experience with formal instruction.

Data Collection

The data collection process employed multiple methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences with the selected and implemented evidence-based practices (EBP). By integrating surveys, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews, data triangulation was achieved, enhancing the validity of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

1. Survey Instruments.

This study employed two structured questionnaires to assess the implementation, effectiveness, and challenges of differentiated and scaffolded instruction in English language teaching. Each questionnaire consisted of three sections assessing implementation practices, perceived effectiveness, and perceived challenges using a 5-point agreement scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Reviewing related literature, the ***Differentiated Instruction Questionnaire*** was adapted from previously pilot-tested and validated by experts in the field, including Magableh and Abdullah (2020), Pereira et al. (2021), Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012), and Talain and Mercado (2023). To fit EFL student teachers, some items were reworded during the adaptation of these instruments for the current study. Experts in the field validated the questionnaire, and it was pilot-tested. Data were analyzed using SPSS 20.0, revealing Cronbach's alpha values of 0.82, 0.76, and 0.81, which indicate the reliability of practices, perceived effectiveness, and perceived challenges, respectively. The questionnaire consisted of 40 items organized into three sections: (a) Implementation Practices (19 items); (b) Perceived Effectiveness (10 items); and (c) Perceived Challenges of differentiated instruction (11 items).

Similarly, the ***Scaffolded Instruction Questionnaire*** was adapted from the well-developed and validated instruments by Awadelkarim (2021), Birjandi and Jazebi (2014), Hong and Nguyen (2019), and Nasr et al. (2018). In adapting these instruments for the current study, some items were reworded to suit EFL student teachers. The questionnaire was validated by experts in the field and pilot-tested. Data were analyzed using SPSS 20.0, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.96, 0.95, and 0.98 indicating the reliability of the practices, perceived effectiveness, and perceived challenges, respectively. The questionnaire comprised 33 items organized into three sections: (a) Implementation Practices (18 items); (b) Perceived Effectiveness (7 items); and (c) Perceived Challenges of differentiated instruction (8 items).

2. Online reflective journals:

Throughout the practicum, participants maintained online, multimodal reflective journals to document their teaching experiences, instructional strategies, and reflections on the selected evidence-based practice (EBP) implementation. The student teachers' reflections included videos, pictures, and texts. These journals provided valuable insights into how student teachers implemented and perceived the challenges and successes of applying the selected EBPs in their classrooms and allowed them to assess their professional growth. The participants submitted journals via Google Classroom, which were analyzed in this study to count the frequency of applying the selected EBPs.

3. Focus group interviews:

Following the practicum, two focus group interviews were employed. A focus group session was conducted for each treatment group, with participants randomly selected to ensure diverse representation of experiences. Each focus group comprises 6 to 8 participants, with session lengths ranging from 30 to 45 minutes. The discussions were designed to foster interactive dialogue and collaborative reflection, aiming to elicit collective insights into applying the selected Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) during the practicum and to identify emergent themes. All focus group sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for qualitative analysis. The focus group discussions were organized into two main sections. The *first section* addressed general experiences with the practicum. The opening question, "Can you share some highlights or challenges you experienced during your practicum?" was posed to initiate the conversation. The *second section*

focused on EBP-specific questions. Core inquiries included, "How did you apply scaffolded or differentiated instruction in your classroom?", "What challenges did you encounter during the implementation?", and "*What kind of support* (mentorship, resources, institutional) *would have improved your implementation of scaffolded or differentiated instruction?* Additionally, Participants were asked, "How do you perceive the impact of scaffolded or differentiated practices on your students' learning?" to prompt reflections on impact.

Description of the Treatment

The intervention was structured around two distinct evidence-based instructional approaches: scaffolded instruction and differentiated instruction, each implemented with a separate cohort of EFL student teachers. Group 1 (n = 32) received training on scaffolded instruction, which emphasized structuring support based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and the Gradual Release of Responsibility model. Group 2 (n = 39) engaged with differentiated instruction, focusing on tailoring teaching to meet diverse learner needs through strategies such as tiered activities, choice boards, and flexible grouping (see Table 1). Both groups began with a two-week prerequisite phase that introduced foundational concepts, including learner diversity, multiple intelligences, and specially designed instruction (SDI), thereby establishing a shared pedagogical baseline.

Over the course of five weeks, participants in both groups engaged in a progressive sequence of direct instruction and interactive workshops. These sessions included direct instruction for introducing theoretical concepts, strategy modeling, collaborative discussions, and practical design tasks. For instance, following the introduction of the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) framework, the scaffolded instruction group engaged in a role-play simulation to apply and internalize its four stages. Additionally, after receiving instruction on the three primary types of scaffolds (verbal, procedural, and instructional), the EFL student teachers practiced identifying and mapping these scaffolds within sample instructional contexts. In parallel, the differentiated instruction group applied their learning by designing tiered assignments and interactive tools such as choice boards and Tic-Tac-Toe grids, after exploring various differentiation techniques, including Choice Boards, Anchor Activities, RAFTs, Cubing, Orbitals, Learning Centers, and

Stations. Furthermore, upon studying flexible grouping strategies, such as homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings, the participants designed collaborative learning activities, including Think-Pair-Share, K-W-L charts, Jigsaw, Reciprocal Teaching, and Six Thinking Hats. These hands-on design tasks aimed to bridge theoretical understanding with practical classroom application, fostering pedagogical adaptability in diverse EFL contexts.

As part of the intervention, both groups of EFL student teachers participated in a structured *Plan–Perform–Reflect* task designed to bridge theoretical understanding with practical application in EFL classrooms. Participants selected one or more strategies aligned with their assigned instructional model (e.g., verbal scaffolding, gradual release of responsibility, tiered assignments, flexible grouping) and developed lesson plans tailored to specific learning objectives. These plans were implemented during their practicum and documented using photographs or video recordings. Following implementation, student teachers engaged in a guided five-phase reflection process: (1) describing the selected technique and instructional context, (2) explaining classroom procedures and teacher-student roles, (3) theorizing by linking practice to relevant educational frameworks, (4) evaluating the pedagogical value and implementation challenges of the chosen strategies, and (5) planning modifications for future use. This assignment provided a structured opportunity for student teachers to analyze and reflect on their pedagogical decision-making, build connections between coursework and classroom enactment, and develop their ability to plan contextually responsive, evidence-based instruction.

The fourth week marked the transition from theory to practice as the student teachers carried out the strategies in their teaching practicum. The intervention concluded with a reflection stage, which included a reflective journal, focus group interviews, and a questionnaire. This comprehensive design ensured both theoretical grounding and contextualized application of EBPs in authentic classroom settings.

Table 1

Overview of EBPs Training for EFL Student Teachers

Component		Group 1: Scaffolded Instruction	Group 2: Differentiated Instruction
Title		Scaffolded Instruction in EFL: Structuring Support for Language Learning	Differentiated Instruction in EFL: Tailoring Teaching to Student Needs
Prerequisites (Two weeks)		• Learner diversity • Learning Styles • Multiple Intelligences • Learner-centered approach • Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)	
Week (1)	**Direct Instruction**	• Definition of scaffolding • Zone of Proximal Development • Gradual Release of Responsibility	• Definition of Differentiation • Principles and elements of DI • Strategies for Managing a Differentiated Classroom
	Workshop (1)	• GRR role-play	• Differentiated instruction vs. Traditional instruction • Collaboratively discussing examples of differentiation
Week (2)	**Direct Instruction**	• Six core scaffolding strategies	• Techniques of differentiated instruction: option of choosing
	Workshop (2)	• Collaboratively discussing six core scaffolding strategies with examples	• Designing Tiered activities, Choice board, Tic-Tac-Toe, and RAFTs
Week (3)	**Direct Instruction**	• Scaffold types (verbal, procedural, instructional)	• Techniques of differentiated instruction: Flexible Grouping
	Workshop (3)	• Scaffold identification and mapping	• Designing Think-Pair-Share, K-W-L
Week (4)	**Planning & Implementation**	Practical application of scaffolded instruction in the practicum	Practical application of scaffolded instruction in the practicum
Week (5)	**Reflection**	• Preparing and submitting Reflective Journals	
Evaluation		• Conducting Focus groups • Conducting the questionnaires	

Results

Results of Group A (Scaffolded Instruction)

1. Implementation of Scaffolded Instruction

Quantitative data from the Scaffolded Instruction Questionnaire indicated that participants reported a moderately high level of implementation (M = 3.63, SD = 1.05), suggesting consistent, though varied, engagement with scaffolded teaching practices (Table 2; Figure 4).

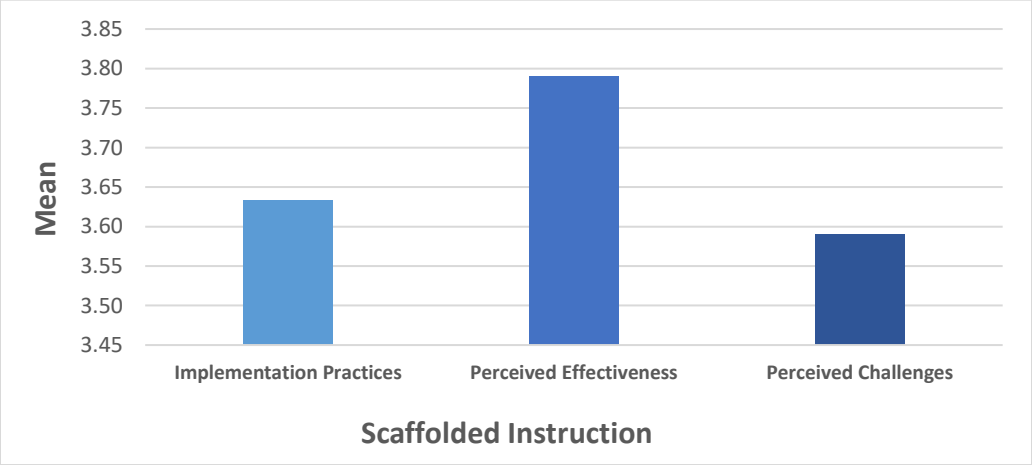
Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of participants' responses on the Scaffolded Instruction Questionnaire

Section	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Implementation Practices	3.63	1.05	1	5
Perceived Effectiveness	3.79	1.00	2	5
Perceived Challenges	3.59	1.14	2	5

Figure 4

Means of participants' responses on the Scaffolded Instruction Questionnaire



Analysis of the implementation practices among the 32 participating EFL student teachers revealed differing levels of engagement with scaffolding strategies across four instructional domains: linguistic, cognitive, metacognitive, and social. On average, participants reported the most frequent use of cognitive scaffolding practices (M = 4.12, SD = 0.47), with particularly high implementation of using visuals, realia, and examples to explain concepts (Item 7: M = 4.47, SD = 0.68) and modeling tasks and strategies (Item 8: M = 4.41, SD = 0.66). Linguistic scaffolding also received strong endorsement (M = 4.00, SD = 0.52), notably for simplifying language and moderating speaking pace (Item 1: M = 4.00, SD = 0.72) and emphasizing key words and sounds (Item 2: M = 4.13, SD = 0.64). In contrast, metacognitive scaffolding emerged as the least implemented domain (M = 3.02, SD = 0.69), with particularly low frequencies in encouraging students to reflect on their learning processes (Item 15: M = 1.44, SD = 0.50). Social scaffolding, while generally positive (M = 4.16, SD = 0.66), was most prominent in practices that encouraged collaborative learning, especially through pair or group work (Item 16: M = 4.50, SD = 0.67). Such findings indicate that the participating student teachers are willing to take on a strong role in language and cognition development; however, they are not proficient in fostering learners' metacognitive awareness, which stands out as a possible area for targeted and reflective pedagogical development.

Through the examination of online reflective journals, it was evident that EFL prospective teachers primarily utilized procedural and instructional scaffolding. As can be seen in Table 3, the most dominant characteristic was Partnering (61.76%), indicating a desire to work with near-equal peers. Small group work (23.53%) and discussion highlighting the importance of 0.59%) were also present, reflecting a theme of active learning. For instructional scaffolding, graphic organizers (29.41%) and models/visuals (23.53%) were the most frequently used supports, indicating the significance of visual support for comprehensibility. Oral scaffolding, much less common, centered around questioning (23.53%) and vocabulary (17.65%) as key supports in enabling student interaction and language development. These findings, as shown in Figure 5, indicate a clear trend among EFL student teachers towards collaborative, visual, and interactive types of scaffolding.

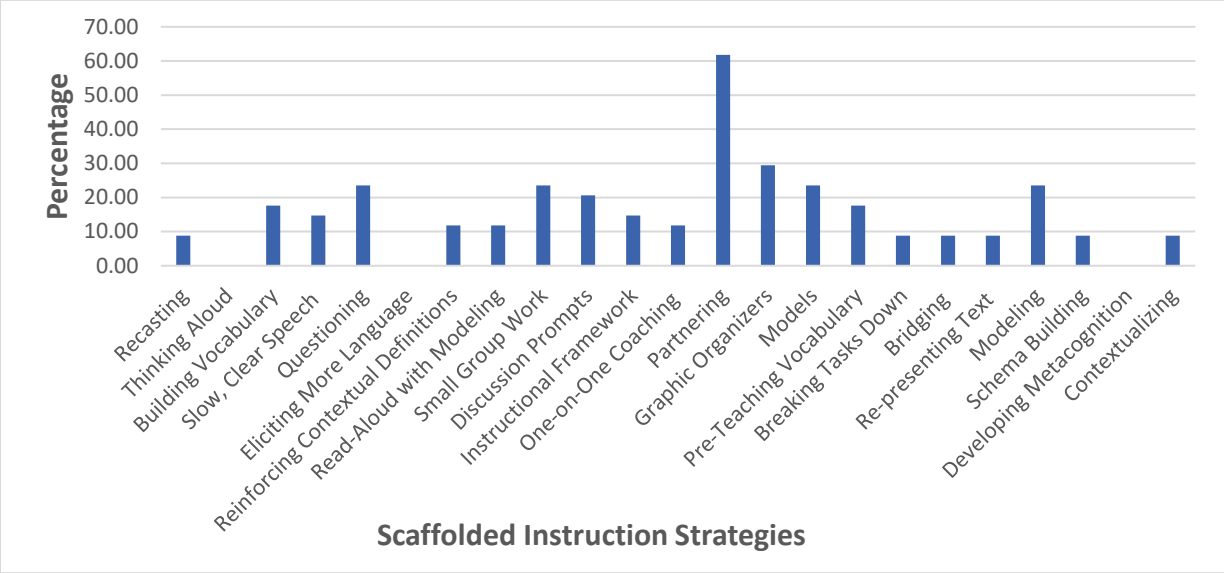
Table 3

Frequency of scaffolding strategies used by EFL student teachers

Types and Strategies of Scaffolding		Frequency	%
Verbal Scaffolding	Recasting	6	8.82
	Thinking Aloud	0	0.00
	Building Vocabulary	12	17.65
	Slow, Clear Speech	10	14.71
	Questioning	16	23.53
	Eliciting More Language	0	0.00
	Reinforcing Contextual Definitions	8	11.76
	Read-Aloud with Modeling	8	11.76
Procedural Scaffolding	Small Group Work	16	23.53
	Discussion Prompts	14	20.59
	Instructional Framework	10	14.71
	One-on-One Coaching	8	11.76
	Partnering	21	61.76
Instructional Scaffolding	Graphic Organizers	20	29.41
	Models and visuals	16	23.53
	Pre-Teaching Vocabulary	12	17.65
	Breaking Tasks Down	6	8.82
	Bridging	6	8.82
	Re-presenting Text	6	8.82
	Modeling	16	23.53
	Schema Building	6	8.82
	Developing Metacognition	0	0.00
	Contextualizing	3	8.82

Figure 5

Percentage of scaffolding strategies used by EFL student teachers



Qualitative analysis of the focus group interviews employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach, which includes familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme identification, review, definition, and reporting. To ensure trustworthiness and confirmability, two researchers independently coded the transcripts, followed by member checking with a subset of participants to validate interpretations. The data analysis of both online reflective journals and focus group interviews revealed distinct themes reflecting participants' perceptions, instructional practices, and challenges related to scaffolded instruction in EFL teaching practicum settings.

Thematic analysis of focus group interviews revealed three interrelated themes (see Table 4), including verbal, procedural, and instructional scaffolding, that characterized participants' classroom practices in supporting student learning. Under verbal scaffolding, EFL student teachers emphasized the use of simplified and repeated instructions to enhance clarity and accessibility (e.g., *"I give simple and clear instructions and repeat them slowly"*) and reported the use of guiding questions and contextual cues to promote comprehension and language awareness. Participants also highlighted strategies like pre-teaching keywords and modeling pronunciation, which closely aligned with quantitative findings of high engagement in linguistic scaffolding.

Procedural scaffolding involved structuring learning through sentence starters, task decomposition, and strategic grouping (e.g., *"I grouped strong and weak students together to help each other"*), which mirrors strong implementation scores in cognitive scaffolding items such as breaking down complex tasks and using peer interaction. Instructional scaffolding practices were also prominent, including the use of graphic organizers, realia, and brainstorming tools to support conceptual understanding and language production. As one participant noted, *"I helped students brainstorm ideas before writing using thinking maps,"* reinforcing the observed emphasis on modeling and contextualization in teaching. These qualitative insights provide rich confirmation of the quantitative data and underscore the multifaceted ways in which EFL student teachers scaffold instruction. However, consistent with survey findings, the absence of metacognitive strategies in participants' reflections may point to a professional learning need in developing students' capacity for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning.

Table 4

Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Interviews about Scaffolded Instruction

Themes	Sub-themes	Supporting Quotes
Scaffolded Instruction Application	Verbal Scaffolding	"I give simple and clear instructions and repeat them slowly."
		"I asked guiding questions to lead students to answers."
		"I presented keywords before reading and listening to make it easier for students."
		"I encouraged students to guess the meaning of difficult words from the context and work with prefixes and suffixes."
		"I modeled reading dialogues aloud before asking students to practice role play."
	Procedural Scaffolding	"I used sentence starters to help students begin writing tasks and speaking activities."
		"I broke down complex tasks such as listening or reading a passage for comprehension into smaller sections."
		"I grouped strong and weak students together to help each other."
		"When I taught grammar, I provided modeling and guided practice before independent work."
		"I group students. Strong with weak together."
	Instructional Scaffolding	"I used graphic organizers to present grammar concepts and keywords."
		"I used pictures and real objects to help students understand new words."

Themes	Sub-themes	Supporting Quotes
		"I helped students brainstorm ideas before writing using thinking maps."
		"I wrote a model example on the board, and then the students completed the blanks."
		"I used real-life examples to connect lessons to students' lives."
		"I checked students' understanding before moving to another part."
Perceived Challenges of Scaffolded Instruction	Limited facilities and Practical Resources	"If I have sample lesson plans, it will be easier."
		"If I have a guidebook like the teacher's guide, it helps me."
		"I need videos showing real teachers using scaffolding with students."
		"Technology problems made it hard to use some scaffolding tools."
	Timing and Fading Management	"It was difficult to know when to stop scaffolding."
		"Sometimes I was not sure how much scaffolding was enough."
		"Students were many, so it was hard to give help to all."
		"Some students didn't like working in pairs or groups."
	Mentor advice and	"My mentor teacher did not give me feedback after the lesson, so I don't know what was good or wrong."
Perceived Effects of Scaffolded Instruction	Impact on participation	"My students are more engaged and active."
		"Yes, students were more active and answered more questions.''
		"When students work as groups, they are afraid of making mistakes."
		"When I use pictures and examples, students speak more English."
	Impact on performance	"Because of using pre-teaching keywords and dividing the listening into sections, they answer all questions after only listening twice."
		"Students do better in speaking and writing tasks."
		"Reading long texts became easier and they answered all questions."

2. Challenges in Implementing Scaffolded Instruction

Participants acknowledged multiple challenges in operationalizing scaffolded instruction, with the overall challenges scale averaging moderately high (M = 3.59, SD = 1.14) (Table 2; Figure 4). The analysis of the survey data (N = 32) highlights significant challenges EFL student teachers encounter in implementing scaffolded instruction, particularly in managing diverse classroom dynamics. Participants rated adapting scaffolding strategies for mixed-ability learners (M = 4.00, SD = 0.94) and effectively managing large classes (M = 4.03, SD = 1.07) as the most significant challenges, indicating that meeting diverse learner needs within complex classroom settings is a major concern. Challenges related to insufficient training and support were also prominent (M =

3.90), with respondents highlighting concerns about student overreliance on scaffolding prompts (M = 4.03, SD = 1.06) and a perceived lack of practical training and mentorship (M = 3.75, SD = 1.14; M = 3.81, SD = 1.06). Although time constraints and the additional effort required for lesson preparation were rated as moderately challenging (M = 3.31, SD = 0.82), these factors still represent a noteworthy barrier to effective scaffolding implementation. These findings suggest that teacher professional development programs should prioritize support for differentiation strategies and scaffolded instruction in large, heterogeneous classrooms, alongside providing ongoing mentorship to mitigate reliance on scaffolding and enhance instructional efficacy.

The qualitative results from focus group interviews, therefore, provide more clarity on the diverse problems encountered by EFL student teachers in applying scaffolded instruction and bring to light three main related themes: insufficient physical facilities and economic resources, problems with timing and fading, and inadequate pilot teacher support. Across all focus groups, a persistent desire for specific instructional supports was evident, with one respondent stating, "*If I have sample lesson plans, it will be easier*," and another specifying, "*I need videos showing real teachers using scaffolding with students.*" These responses reveal an obvious request for visual, organized, and context-dependent professional materials to connect theory and practice. The second theme centered on the complexity of managing when and how to fade scaffolding, as participants reported uncertainty about *"how much scaffolding was enough"* and noted challenges in reaching all students in crowded classrooms. Social dynamics also emerged as a constraint, with some participants stating that *"students didn't like working in pairs or groups."* Finally, the role of mentorship appeared limited, with one teacher lamenting, *"My mentor teacher did not give me feedback after the lesson, so I don't know what was good or wrong."* These themes collectively reinforce the survey findings, highlighting the systemic and contextual barriers that hinder effective scaffolded instruction and underscoring the need for structured guidance, practical modeling, and sustained pedagogical feedback within teacher education and in-service training programs.

As a whole, these integrated findings provide robust evidence that addressing scaffolded instruction challenges requires a comprehensive approach encompassing professional development, resource allocation, and structured mentorship to empower EFL student teachers in delivering effective, differentiated support within complex classroom environments.

3. Perceived Influence of Scaffolded Instruction on Student Learning Outcomes

Survey results suggested that scaffolded instruction was widely accepted as a pedagogical practice for language learning. The mean score for perceived effectiveness was high in general (M = 3.79, SD = 1.00), indicating consensus among respondents regarding the extent to which scaffolding can help students learn. The highest ratings endorsed in this section were for the items related to the dimensions of fostering peer interaction (M = 4.32) and fostering activity participation (M = 4.06), indicating that scaffolding is quite effective in promoting cooperative and activity-based learning. Respondents also noted the benefit of helping all learners who are in need (M = 4.23) and the power of scaffolded techniques to promote inclusivity. However, responses related to the role of scaffolding in boosting learner confidence through language skills (M = 3.13) and in furthering learner autonomy (M = 3.35) were less favorable (though still above neutral). These results suggest that although scaffolded instruction is believed to be effective in promoting engagement and inclusivity, further development is needed to create more opportunities for independent language use and self-directed learning. In sum, the findings confirm the pedagogical value of scaffolding, particularly in settings where interaction and individualized support are valued.

Quantitative analysis of participants' responses to the perceived effectiveness of scaffolded instruction revealed generally high levels of agreement across all items. The domain of *Learning Outcomes and Engagement*, which encompassed five items related to academic performance, confidence, and collaboration, received the highest overall mean score of 3.84 (SD values ranging from 0.62 to 1.03 on individual items). This indicates that EFL student teachers are very positive towards the possibilities that scaffolded instruction offers regarding students' language learning results, students' active involvement, and peer collaboration. One item with a high approval rate, *"Scaffolding encourages better peer interaction and collaboration among students"*. In the domain of *Learner Independence*, the mean score was slightly lower at 3.64, indicating that while participants recognized the role of scaffolding in helping to support autonomy and assist learners who are struggling, it was slightly less strong than its effectiveness on engagement.

Taken together, these findings provide support for the use of scaffolded instruction as a teaching method that increases language development and enables learners to be more confident

in participating in communicative learning environments. Results highlight the potential of scaffolding to promote inclusive, participatory learning settings, as well as the need for additional approaches that target the emotional engagement of students and increase learner control.

Results of Group B (Differentiated Instruction)

1. Implementation of Differentiated Instruction

The mean score for Implementation Practices was 3.03 (SD = 1.40), indicating a moderate level of reported implementation of differentiated instruction strategies, particularly in process and product differentiation. The relatively high standard deviation suggests variability in implementation across respondents (Table 5; Figure 6).

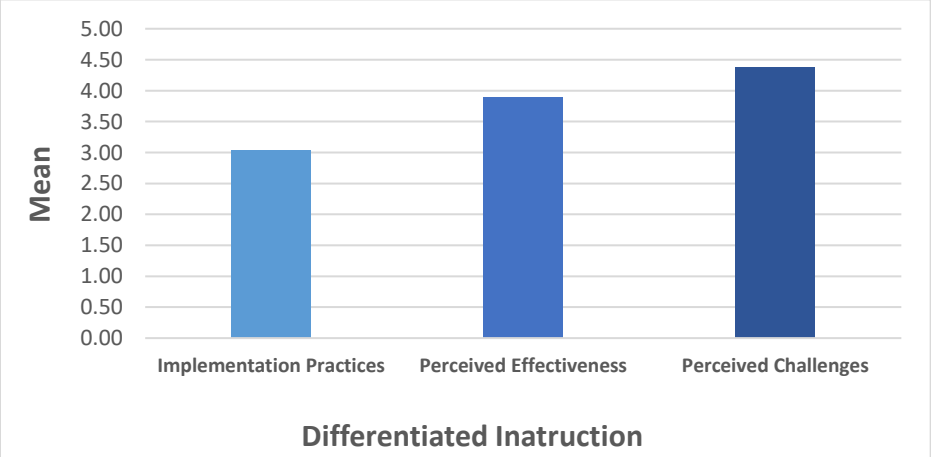
Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of participants' responses on the Differentiated Instruction Questionnaire

Section	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Implementation Practices	3.03	1.40	1	5
Perceived Effectiveness	3.88	1.72	1	5
Perceived Challenges	4.38	0.77	2	5

Figure 6

Means of participants' responses on the Differentiated Instruction Questionnaire



Survey responses indicated variability in the application of differentiated strategies. Within the domain of content differentiation, moderate implementation was evident in the use of varied instructional strategies to support student understanding (M = 3.87, SD = 0.77) and the integration of diverse materials (M = 3.33, SD = 0.87). In contrast, practices such as providing materials at varying levels of difficulty were employed less frequently (M = 1.36, SD = 0.58). Process differentiation emerged as the most consistently practiced domain, with notably high endorsement of interactive and flexible activity formats (M = 4.46, SD = 0.68) and dynamic classroom grouping strategies (M = 3.82, SD = 0.88). However, adjusting instruction in response to student feedback received comparatively lower ratings (M = 2.74, SD = 0.75). Product differentiation was the least implemented, with minimal use of differentiated assessments (M = 1.15, SD = 0.37) and limited flexibility in assignment deadlines (M = 1.41, SD = 0.68). In contrast, the learning environment domain reflected strong implementation, particularly in establishing a supportive and inclusive classroom climate (M = 4.44, SD = 0.68). These results indicate that, although EFL student teachers demonstrate a commitment to differentiating teaching and creating classroom-friendly environments, there is a need for more professional development that will enable teachers to provide tailored content and assessments that cater to learners' diversity.

Analysis of online reflective journals (Table 6) indicated that process differentiation emerged most prominently in the reflective accounts, with student teachers frequently referencing the use of choice boards (43.59%), Tic-Tac-Toe activities (35.90%), and tiered activities (35.90%) as tools to address learner variability. Collaborative strategies such as Think-Pair-Share (23.08%) and using graphic organizers (15.38%) also featured in several narratives, suggesting a growing pedagogical orientation toward flexible and interactive classroom structures. However, more conceptually demanding strategies, such as reciprocal teaching, jigsaw activities, and the Six Thinking Hats framework, were not reported, pointing to potential limitations in either exposure or confidence to implement such methods.

Table 6

Frequency of Differentiated strategies used by EFL student teachers

Types and Strategies of Differentiation		Frequency	%
Differentiation by Content	Varying Resources and Materials	1	2.56
	Varying presentation methods	4	10.26
	Tiered Content	0	0.00
	Orbitals	0	0.00
	Compacting	0	0.00
Differentiation by Process	Tiered Activities	14	35.90
	Learning Centers	3	7.69
	Learning Stations	0	0.00
	Jigsaw Activities	0	0.00
	Varying Questions	4	10.26
	Tic-Tac-Toe	14	35.90
	Choice Boards	17	43.59
	K-W-L Charts	3	7.69
	Graphic Organizers	6	15.38
	Reciprocal Teaching	0	0.00
	Six Thinking Hats	0	0.00
	Think-Pair-Share	9	23.08
Differentiation by Product	RAFT	1	2.56
	Tiered Assignments	12	30.77
	Cubing	2	5.13
Differentiation by Learning Environment	Flexible seating	5	12.82
	Anchor activities	1	2.56
	Safe Learning Zones	0	0.00
	Clear Procedures and Routines	6	15.38

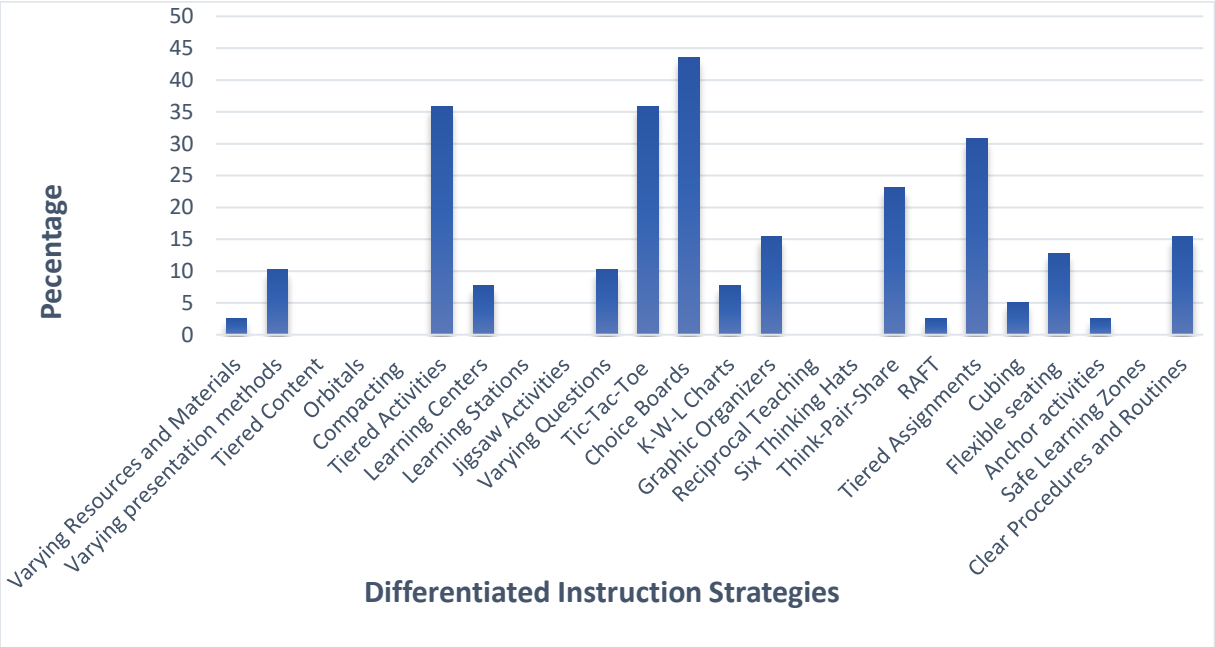
In contrast, content differentiation was minimally represented. While some student teachers indicated using varied presentation methods (10.26%) and instructional materials (2.56%), more advanced practices such as compacting, tiered content, and orbitals were entirely absent. Product differentiation was somewhat more evident, with a minority implementing tiered assignments (30.77%) to accommodate student readiness levels. However, strategies designed to offer format variety, such as RAFT (2.56%) and cubing (5.13%), were rarely documented. Reflections on learning environment differentiation primarily referred to using flexible seating (12.82%) and

establishing clear classroom procedures (15.38%), with little attention given to practices that cultivate emotionally safe or student-centered spaces.

These findings, as shown in Figure 7, suggest that EFL student teachers primarily adopt differentiation techniques that are more visible, concrete, and manageable within the constraints of practicum settings, while neglecting cognitively demanding or affective strategies. The underutilization of content and environment differentiation may be attributed to structural constraints within practicum settings, limited autonomy, or a lack of exposure to more cognitively and socially demanding practices during pre-service preparation. These results underscore the need for teacher education programs to provide preservice teachers with more focused, real-world practice in a variety of differentiated instruction strategies to ensure that prospective teachers are conceptually and practically prepared to teach students with diverse needs.

Figure 7

Percentage of Differentiated strategies used by EFL student teachers



Qualitative analysis of focus group interviews of EFL student teachers (see Table 7), employing a thematic analysis approach, revealed an emerging but meaningful engagement with differentiated instruction during their practicum placements. Participants explained that they tried

to adjust their instructional input for their students in diverse ways, including multimodal compensations such as visual cues, gestures, synonyms, and contextual information, to make the content more accessible. Some also said they adjusted the way they questioned according to students' readiness, going back and forth as needed from closed-ended to open-ended questioning. Teachers also used the time as a temporal flexibility strategy by extending task time for students who needed help. Grouping practices were frequently referenced, with student teachers intentionally designing heterogeneous groupings to facilitate peer interaction and scaffolded learning. As one participant explained, *"I made sure each group had strong and weak students together, so they could help each other,"* suggesting an emerging pedagogical awareness of the social and cognitive dimensions of differentiation. Participants also elaborated on planning tiered assignments and allowing students to choose through options such as choice boards and Tic-Tac-Toe assignments to promote autonomy and motivation. Although these practices are not yet widely developed, they suggest an emerging capacity for prospective teachers to adopt inclusive and responsive pedagogy. They reflect not only an emergent awareness of the variety of learners but also the first steps in pedagogical reasoning for designing and implementing differentiated learning experiences in a real classroom context.

Table 7

Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Interviews about Differentiated Instruction

Themes	Sub-themes	Supporting Quotes
Differentiated Instruction Application	Tailoring Instruction to Needs	"When I present keywords, I use different methods such as examples, synonyms/antonyms, pictures, and gestures."
		"I varied my questioning: simple 'yes/no' for some, open-ended for others."
		"I gave more time to students who needed it."
		"When students work individually, I move around the class and give more guidance to some students."
	Flexible grouping	"I created different group tasks according to students' abilities."
		"I used different grouping techniques such as large groups, small groups, pairs, and individual work."
		"In group activities, I made sure each group had strong and weak students together, so they could help each other."
		"I created tiered grammar activities with three levels: easy, medium, and hard, so everyone felt challenged."

Themes	Sub-themes	Supporting Quotes
	Planning multiple activities	“I prepared choice boards and Tic-Tac-Toe based on different learning styles and multiple intelligences.”
		"I let students choose between drawing, writing, or talking about a topic."
		“I used tiering in writing tasks to make all students work.”
Perceived Challenges of Differentiated Instruction	Lack of ready-made resources	“If I have more sample lesson plans, it will be easier.”
		“Having templates for creating tiered tasks easily could help me do better.”
		“If there are ready-made differentiated resources, it would help me do better.”
	Time Management	“Creating materials and activities for different levels takes a lot of time.”
		“I don’t have enough time to prepare different worksheets and activities.”
	Management Issues	It is difficult to control the class when students do different activities.”
		"Some students still needed more support even after differentiation."
		“Sometimes groups got noisy when advanced students finished early.”
		“It was hard to check learning for each group at the same time.”
	Need for Training	“I need more training with real activities about how to apply it.”
	Mentoring Issues	“I need to revise my lesson plan with my supervisor before teaching.”
		“If my mentor gives me feedback after each lesson, it would be great.”
Perceived Effects of Differentiated Instruction	Impact on Engagement	“Students participated more when they had activities they could do.”
		"Students engaged more because they had choices."
		“Students are more motivated, especially poor students.”
	Impact on confidence	"Students felt more comfortable and successful because tasks matched their level."
		“I noticed that students gained more confidence, and fewer students stayed silent during activities.”
	Improved Performance	“I saw better performance during speaking activities and assessment at the end of the lesson.”

2. Challenges in Implementing Differentiated Instruction

The results of the survey revealed that EFL student teachers perceive differentiated instruction as a multifaceted challenge, primarily constrained by time, resources, and systemic support structures. Among the eleven surveyed items, the most significant challenge identified was related to managing large and mixed-ability classrooms. Specifically, Item 4 ("Meeting the individual needs of students in mixed-ability groups is difficult") recorded the highest mean score of 4.69 (SD = 0.57), closely followed by Item 3 ("I find it difficult to implement differentiated instruction effectively in large classes") with a mean of 4.64 (SD = 0.60). These findings indicate a strong consensus among participants regarding the complexity of catering to diverse learners within a single instructional context. Similarly, strong curriculum-related concerns were also expressed; Item 10 (Differentiated instruction slows down my ability to cover the full curriculum content on time) received the highest mean score of 4.51 (SD = 0.70), indicating a perceived tension between pedagogical responsiveness and institutional pacing demands. Furthermore, while slightly lower in intensity, challenges associated with resource constraints (Item 1: M = 4.44, SD = 0.62) and insufficient training (Item 8: M = 4.46, SD = 0.62) reflect a broader systemic issue of inadequate professional development and material support. These results suggest the need for structural changes to successfully implement differentiated instruction in classroom practice, particularly by reducing class sizes and adjusting curricula to be more inclusive, as well as improving professional development for teachers.

Focus group discussions provided valuable qualitative information to support the survey results, revealing the obstacles to implementing DI from the perspective of EFL student teachers. Another common theme focused on the lack of prepared support materials, with participants expressing the need for something more concrete: *"If I have more sample lesson plans, it will be easier"* and *"Having templates for creating tiered tasks could help me do better."* This concern is consistent with Item 1 of our survey (M = 4.44, SD = 0.62), which suggests that resource scarcity is a significant challenge. Time management was another pressing issue, as participants described the workload involved in creating differentiated materials: *"Creating materials and activities for different levels takes a lot of time."* Correspondingly, Item 2 (M = 4.41, SD = 0.60) indicated broad agreement about the time demands of differentiation. Participants also reported significant classroom management difficulties, especially when students were engaged in different tasks

simultaneously. One participant remarked, *"It is difficult to control the class when students do different activities,"* while another noted, *"Groups got noisy when advanced students finished early."* These challenges were reflected in the two highest-rated survey items: Item 4 (M = 4.69) and Item 5 (M = 4.56), related to addressing individual needs and maintaining order. Furthermore, EFL student teachers emphasized a need for more practical training, stating, *"I need more training with real activities about how to apply it,"* aligning with Item 8 (M = 4.46). Finally, participants highlighted the value of mentoring and feedback: *"If my mentor gives me feedback after each lesson, it would be great,"* reflecting the moderate concern found in Item 9 (M = 4.38).

In general, both qualitative and quantitative data suggest that EFL student teachers are open to the application of differentiated instruction; however, the practice of the instruction is not consistently effective due to scarce resources, time constraints, and insufficient professional support. These findings reveal the competing pedagogical and structural demands for differentiation, as well as the need for scaffolded professional learning and richer mentoring and resources to support effective differentiation across diverse classrooms.

3. Perceived Influence of Differentiated Instruction on Student Learning Outcomes

Analysis of the participants' responses regarding the effectiveness of differentiated instruction revealed that participants felt it was successful in several areas. Descriptive statistics revealed participant consensus across the ten items, with acceptable mean scores ranging from 3.25 to 4.67. Items assessing academic outcomes showed particularly strong endorsement; for example, Item 1 (differentiated instruction improves student performance in reading, writing, speaking, and listening) yielded a mean of 4.41 (SD = 0.81), while Item 2 (leads to higher overall student achievement) averaged 4.35 (SD = 0.84). In the domain of student engagement and motivation, responses to Item 4 (tailored tasks increase engagement and participation) also reflected high agreement (M = 4.46, SD = 0.73). Items related to equity and inclusiveness and classroom climate were similarly positive, with Item 5 and Item 8 scoring means of 4.29 and 4.20, respectively. Notably, Item 10 (supports independence and higher-order thinking) received the lowest average rating (M = 3.25, SD = 0.89), suggesting some reservations about its long-term cognitive impact. While there was some variation, the results indicate a high degree of agreement among participants that differentiated instruction has pedagogical merit, specifically in terms of

student engagement, inclusivity, and achievement. The relatively lower ratings on promoting student independence invite further inquiry into how differentiation strategies are implemented and supported over time.

Thematic analysis of focus group interviews revealed three primary themes concerning the perceived effects of differentiated instruction: increased engagement, enhanced confidence, and improved performance (see Table 6). Participants consistently reported that differentiated instruction significantly heightened student engagement, particularly when students were offered choice and tasks were accessible to their ability levels. As one teacher explained, *"Students participated more when they had activities they could do,"* while another noted that *"Students engaged more because they had choices."*

Crucially, this higher level of engagement has been least evident among students traditionally recognized as poor achievers: "*Students are more motivated, especially poor students.*" Another theme focused on the effect of differentiation on student self-esteem. The pre-service EFL teachers realized how graded tasks had caused a shift in classroom participation and self-confidence. One remarked, "*Students felt more comfortable and successful because tasks matched their level,"* while another stated, *"I noticed that students gained more confidence, and fewer students stayed silent during activities.*" The third theme, enhanced academic success, was based on participants' comments on teaching and testing. In particular, they connected differentiated practices to benefits in language proficiency. A participant said, "*I saw better performance during speaking activities and assessment at the end of the lesson*."

Taken together, these qualitative findings complement the quantitative survey data described above, suggesting that differentiated instruction not only facilitates academic success but also contributes to a more inclusive, motivating, and affirming classroom environment.

Discussion

This study examined how EFL student teachers incorporate evidence-based practices (EBPs), specifically scaffolded and differentiated instruction, into their teaching practicum. Drawing on survey data, reflective journals, and focus group interviews, the results provide

valuable insights into implementation, impact, and the challenges pre-service teachers encountered when applying these strategies.

1. Implementation of EBPs in Practicum Settings

The first research question focused on how EFL student teachers implemented scaffolded and differentiated instruction during their practicum. Findings revealed that scaffolded instruction was applied more consistently and effectively than differentiated instruction. Within the scaffolding group, cognitive and linguistic support, including visuals, modeling, simplified language, and collaborative tasks, was highly implemented. Reflective journals and interviews further highlighted the use of graphic organizers, small-group activities, and verbal guidance as dominant strategies. However, metacognitive scaffolding is still underutilized, indicating the need for professional development on how to support learner autonomy and reflection. These findings align with those of Hong and Nguyen (2019), who found that questioning was the most commonly used scaffolding strategy to support student learning. Additionally, these results align with those of Tajeddin et al. (2020), who found that teachers favored modeling, bridging, and schema building rather than developing metacognition.

In contrast, differentiated instruction was moderately implemented, with a greater emphasis on process strategies, such as tiered activities, choice boards, and flexible grouping. Product differentiation and learner-specific content adaptations were used less frequently, likely due to limited training and practicum constraints. While participants demonstrated creativity in designing inclusive and interactive tasks, they reported less confidence in adjusting assessments or curriculum pacing. The findings of the current study differ from those of Şaban and Atay (2023) and Talain and Mercado (2023), who found that English language teachers in Turkey and the Philippines favored differentiating learning environment and content over differentiating process and product in their instructional practices. Additionally, Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012) found that teachers focused mainly on differentiating the learning environment and content rather than the process and product. This contradiction may be due to the different context, as the Egyptian educational system is highly centralized, and the Ministry of Education predetermines the curriculum content. Accordingly, EFL student teachers felt that they had limited opportunities to differentiate the content. This highlights the flexible and context-sensitive nature of differentiated

instruction; as Tomlinson (2017) asserts, differentiation is not a uniform methodology but a flexible framework that empowers teachers to make informed pedagogical choices from a broad repertoire of strategies.

2. Challenges in Applying EBPs

The second research question addressed the barriers student teachers encountered. Consistent across both groups were challenges related to large class sizes, mixed-ability learners, limited instructional resources, and insufficient mentor feedback. Participants highlighted difficulties in managing time, fading support appropriately, and maintaining engagement when learners completed tasks at varying speeds.

For scaffolded instruction, challenges focus on the lack of concrete models, uncertainty about the fading process, and students' overreliance on scaffolds. The findings are consistent with the results reported by Awadelkarim (2021) and Hong and Nguyen (2019), who also found that EFL instructors, particularly novice ones, struggle with planning and gradually withdrawing support to promote learner autonomy. They expressed the need for structured training to refine their scaffolding practices.

For differentiated instruction, the main issues were the perceived difficulty of customizing tasks for individual students and the lack of readily available resources. Both sets of groups raised the issue of greater direct training, practical illustrations, and sustained support in lesson planning and delivery. These results align with the conclusions drawn in the studies conducted by Santangelo and Tomlinson (2012), Suprayogi et al. (2017), and Tajik et al. (2024), which similarly emphasized the need for more preparation and professional support in implementing differentiation to attain the higher levels of DI implementation observed in other educational contexts.

3. Perceived Impact on Student Learning

Concerning the third research question, participants generally regarded the two instructional approaches (Differentiation and Scaffolding) as effective in improving students' engagement, participation, and performance. Scaffolding instruction was emphasized for enhancing students' responsiveness, particularly in speaking, reading, and collaborative activities. Differentiated

instruction was found to be beneficial in enhancing motivation, confidence, and inclusivity, particularly among lower-achieving students. Nevertheless, both groups noted limited evidence of these practices fostering learner autonomy or higher-order thinking, suggesting the need for deeper pedagogical preparation to develop these competencies. The findings of the present study align with the results of numerous studies that demonstrated the effectiveness of both scaffolding and differentiation in enhancing students' learning, fostering autonomy, and elevating engagement (AM et al., 2023; Awadelkarim, 2021; Groenewald, E., Groenewald et al., 2024; Hong & Nguyen, 2019; Magableh & Abdullah, 2020; Nasr et al., 2018; Ojong, 2023; Tajeddin et al., 2020; Tajik et al., 2024)

These findings collectively align with prior studies, which emphasize that while Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) can enhance instructional quality, their success depends on context-sensitive implementation, sustained mentorship, and access to resources (Richards & Farrell, 2020; Hwang, 2023; Diery et al., 2021). In this context, Scheeler et al. (2016) outline six key barriers to implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) in teacher training, including limited training, weak support, and poor generalization. Likely, Burns and Richards (2021) assert that pre-service teachers often feel unprepared to adopt evidence-based practices (EBPs) due to minimal classroom exposure, which makes it difficult for them to apply theory in practice.

This study sheds valuable light on how EFL student teachers integrate evidence-based practices (EBPs) during their teaching practicum. Still, several limitations need to be acknowledged when interpreting the results. As a primary consideration, the research was carried out in a single Egyptian institutional setting, specifically within public school practicum environments. While this allowed for rich, contextually grounded insights, the findings may not easily translate to other educational contexts, especially those that differ in terms of institutional support, curriculum flexibility, or mentorship systems. Future research would be well served by undertaking multi-institutional or cross-cultural investigations to more comprehensively examine how systemic and cultural dynamics influence the enactment of evidence-based practices in teacher education.

Another limitation concerns the dependence on self-reported data sources, such as surveys, reflective journals, and focus group discussions. Despite using multiple tools for triangulation, these methods are inherently prone to bias, such as participants' self-perception, memory recall, or

the desire to present themselves favorably. To strengthen the validity of future research, incorporating direct classroom observations, samples of student work, classroom quizzes, and evaluations from mentors or supervisors may provide a more nuanced and accurate representation of how evidence-based practices are enacted in practice.

Additionally, the study focused on two instructional strategies, scaffolded and differentiated instruction. Although these are widely supported approaches, they do not encompass the full range of EBPs available to teachers. Future research might explore how pre-service educators engage with additional strategies, such as formative assessment, cooperative learning, strategy-based instruction, task-based language teaching, or technology-enhanced learning. The intervention was also constrained to five weeks due to the academic calendar of the teacher preparation program. Although this timeframe facilitated structured opportunities for scaffolded practice and critical reflection, it may have limited the scope for deeper, sustained instructional growth. As such, it may not fully capture the complexity and evolving nature of long-term pedagogical change. Longitudinal studies following student teachers into their early years of teaching could offer deeper insight into how initial exposure to EBPs shapes their ongoing professional development and classroom impact.

Lastly, while many participants use some differentiation strategies, their practices lack the key components of a comprehensive model, such as ongoing assessment and attention to diverse readiness levels, indicating limited fidelity to full differentiation. In parallel, participants showed limited development in areas like metacognitive scaffolding and product differentiation. These findings highlight the need for targeted professional learning experiences that help pre-service teachers build a stronger grasp of how to foster learner independence and critical thinking. Experimental studies could be useful in testing training approaches designed to enhance these specific teaching skills.

In sum, these limitations suggest that future research should adopt longitudinal, multimethod, and contextually varied approaches to better understand the conditions that support the successful use of EBPs in teacher education.

Conclusion

This study highlights that EFL student teachers in Egyptian practicum contexts demonstrate a strong awareness of scaffolded and differentiated instruction and are motivated to apply these evidence-based practices (EBPs). However, their ability to implement these strategies effectively is constrained by systemic factors, including overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, and limited professional support. Scaffolded instruction has emerged as a more confidently applied approach, particularly in promoting collaborative learning and cognitive support, though metacognitive development remains a neglected area. Although promising in the aspect of process differentiation, differentiated instruction requires more focused support in terms of specified instruction and resources to be fully integrated into lesson content and assessment. To narrow the gap between research and practice, teacher preparation should adopt a more systematic, research-based approach. This approach involves embedding clinically rich training experiences, reinforcing feedback loops, and modeling effective evidence-based practices (EBPs) throughout the coursework. Mentorship must also be redefined as an ongoing, collaborative practice rooted in research-informed pedagogy.

Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs

To put EBPs into practice, teacher education should:

1. Developing teacher educators' expertise in EBPs through regular EBP-focused professional development and building learning communities for collaborative engagement with modeling and incorporating EBPs in teaching practices.
2. Integrating EBPs within the curriculum in teacher education through observing and analyzing EBPs in classrooms, micro-teaching labs, video modeling, and peer coaching helps student teachers rehearse effective instructional strategies. These practices promote adaptive decision-making and effectively bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world classroom application.
3. Developing research literacy and reflective dispositions involves student teachers in critical activities such as journal clubs and EBP design tasks. These experiences foster the ability to interpret, evaluate, and apply research while promoting ongoing professional growth and instructional innovation.

4. Providing clinically rich experiences and fostering effective mentorship through tools like structured observations, video analysis, microteaching, and co-teaching models, co-reflection, and structured feedback and coaching. These scaffolded practicum experiences distributed throughout the teacher education program allow student teachers to refine their strategies, apply evidence-based practices in real-world contexts, and enhance teaching effectiveness and EBP mastery.
5. Maintaining the integrity of evidence-based claims in education through adopting standardized definitions, independent validation, and the consistent use of terminology. These practices promote conceptual clarity, reinforce accountability, and enable more informed and transparent decision-making across educational contexts. The Ministry of Education should form a partnership with the faculties of education to examine the validity of EBPs before publishing them or incorporating them in teacher professional development training.
6. Ensuring open access to EBP resources, including summaries, lesson plans, manuals, and online toolkits with practical implementation guides for differentiated and scaffolded strategies tailored to EFL contexts. The Ministry of Education should collaborate with teacher educators at faculties of education to create centralized online repositories to offer educators timely and organized access to validated EBP resources that fit the needs of the Egyptian context.
7. Sustained implementation of evidence-based practices is best supported through ongoing professional learning that includes in-class coaching and modeling by specialists, coupled with structured continuous improvement cycles that enable teachers to reflect on their experiences, collaboratively address challenges, and iteratively refine their practice based on both outcomes and peer feedback.

Future Directions

Future studies should inform both research and policy to strengthen the integration of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in EFL teacher education through:

1. Investigating the longitudinal impact and sustainability of EBP-focused professional development beyond the practicum phase.

2. Examining mentorship models that explicitly support scaffold fading and differentiated instruction design.
3. Exploring the adaptation of EBPs across diverse cultural and institutional contexts to identify broadly applicable and context-sensitive models.
4. Analyzing the interaction between institutional support, teacher beliefs, and contextual factors in shaping effective EBP implementation.
5. Evaluating the role of metacognitive training in promoting learner autonomy and self-regulation in language classrooms.
6. Conducting qualitative research, particularly through phenomenological approaches, to capture EFL student teachers' lived experiences of implementing EBPs during practicum.
7. Encouraging policymakers to increase funding for research that informs the development of evidence-based curricula in teacher education.
8. Revising faculty promotion criteria to include contributions such as meta-analyses that enrich the evidence base, elevate instructional practices, and advance research quality.

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تمكين الطلاب المعلمين تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من الممارسات القائمة على الأدلة: نتائج من التدريب الميداني

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ملخص البحث:

إن تضمين الممارسات القائمة على الأدلة (EBPs) في برامج إعداد معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يحمل إمكانات كبيرة لتلبية متطلبات الجودة في التدريس وتحقيق تعلم فعّال لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية. ومع ذلك، لا يزال تنفيذ هذه الممارسات خلال فترة التدريب العملي على التدريس محدودًا من حيث البحث والتطوير، خاصةً في البيئات ذات الموارد المحدودة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية توظيف إحدى وسبعين من الطلاب المعلمين تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية للممارسات القائمة على الأدلة أثناء تدريبهم العملي، مع تحليل التحديات التي يواجهونها وأثر هذه الممارسات على تعلم الطلبة. وقد تم تقسيم المشاركين إلى مجموعتين وفقًا لمنهج دراسة الحالة: ركزت المجموعة الأولى (عددها = 32) على التدريس المتدرج بالسقالات التعليمية (Scaffolded Instruction)، بينما ركزت المجموعة الثانية (عددها = 39) على التدريس المتمايز (Differentiated Instruction). تلقّت كل مجموعة معالجة وتدريب منظم لمدة خمسة أسابيع، اشتمل على مدخلات نظرية، ونمذجة للاستراتيجيات، ومهام تصميم تعاونية، إلى جانب تكليف "خطّط – نفّذ – تأمّل" لربط النظرية بالتطبيق. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة على استخدام منهجية البحث المختلط، حيث جُمعت البيانات من استبيانات، ومذكرات تأملية إلكترونية، ومقابلات جماعية مركزة. وتم تحليل البيانات الكمية والنوعية وتفسيرها لكل حالة على حدة وكذلك بشكل تكاملي بين الحالتين. أظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب المعلمين تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية يمتلكون معرفة بالممارسات القائمة على الأدلة، إلا أن محدودية الموارد، وصعوبات إدارة الصف، وضعف التوجيه الفعّال، تشكّل عوائق أمام تطبيق تلك الممارسات. وتختتم الدراسة بعدد من التوصيات لتطوير برامج إعداد معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية ومعالجة التحديات المرتبطة بتطبيق الممارسات القائمة على الأدلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الممارسات القائمة على الأدلة، الطلاب المعلمين تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية، التدريب العملي على التدريس، التدريس المتدرج بالسقالات التعليمية، التدريس المتمايز