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SCAFFOLDING IN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING: EFFECTIVENESS, STRATEGIES, AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

In this article, a mixed-methods approach was employed to assess the effectiveness of scaffolding as a technique in second language teaching. The study involved both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. A thorough review of existing literature on scaffolding in second language education was conducted. The review focused on understanding the theoretical foundations, key strategies, and challenges associated with scaffolding.

Classroom observations were conducted in language learning environments where scaffolding techniques were implemented. Observations focused on teacher-student interactions, the use of scaffolding methods, and the overall classroom atmosphere.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with language teachers who implemented scaffolding techniques in their lessons. The interviews aimed to gather insights into teachers' experiences, the challenges they faced, and their perceptions of scaffolding's effectiveness.

Surveys were distributed to students who participated in scaffolding-based lessons. The surveys assessed their perceptions of the learning process, including engagement, comprehension, and language skill improvement.

Student surveys indicated a high level of engagement and motivation in classrooms where scaffolding was used. Students reported that the interactive nature of scaffolding made the learning process more enjoyable and effective.

Classroom observations revealed that scaffolding techniques facilitated more frequent and meaningful teacher-student interactions. Teachers were able to provide targeted support based on individual students' needs, which contributed to a more personalized learning experience.

While scaffolding proved effective, some challenges were noted. Teachers reported difficulties in maintaining the appropriate level of support for each student without overwhelming them. Additionally, limited class time and large class sizes made it challenging to provide individualized scaffolding to all students.

The research highlighted that scaffolding allows for differentiated learning, where instruction can be tailored to meet the varying needs of students. This was especially beneficial in mixed-ability classrooms, where students could progress at their own pace.

The findings confirm that scaffolding is an effective technique for enhancing second language learning. It promotes active engagement, improves comprehension, and helps students achieve greater language proficiency.

The research demonstrates that scaffolding can be successfully implemented in a variety of classroom settings. Teachers can use different scaffolding strategies, such as providing prompts, using visuals, and offering feedback, to support students at different stages of their learning.

Future studies could explore the long-term effects of scaffolding on second language acquisition, especially in different cultural or educational contexts. Additionally, examining the impact of digital tools and technology on scaffolding in language learning could provide valuable insights.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that language teachers incorporate scaffolding techniques into their lessons to foster a more interactive and supportive learning environment. Teachers should also be mindful of the challenges involved and seek ways to balance the level of support provided to each student.

KEYWORDS

Language, Teaching, Scaffolding, Activities

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1. Introduction

Innovative developments in the first quarter of the 21st century have significantly transformed many aspects of life, including the pedagogical approaches used in English language teaching and learning. Among these innovations, one technique that stands out is *scaffolding*. In education, scaffolding refers to various instructional strategies designed to help students gradually achieve a deeper understanding and greater independence in the learning process. The term itself is a metaphor: much like physical scaffolding supports construction workers as they build, educational scaffolding provides temporary support that enables learners to reach levels of comprehension and skill acquisition they might not attain on their own. This article explores the role of scaffolding in teaching English, based on practical experience in the classroom. Before describing and analyzing that experience, we will address two central questions: *Why is scaffolding effective in language teaching?* and *How can teachers implement scaffolding strategies effectively?*

2. Theoretical Background

The concept of scaffolding was first introduced in the seminal 1976 article "*The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving*" by David Wood, Jerome Bruner, and Gail Ross. Scaffolding refers to providing appropriate assistance that enables students to accomplish tasks they would find too difficult to complete independently. Visual scaffolding, in particular, involves the use of images and text that can be both seen and heard. This method is especially effective for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, as it helps them not only grasp essential content but also improve their language skills through comprehensible input.

As students develop their learning strategies and become more autonomous, scaffolding is gradually removed. This fosters the development of their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills. Teachers can provide various types of scaffolding support, such as outlines, guided questions, recommended resources, and visual aids.

Rather than reviewing the scaffolding literature in detail, we reference key works that offer conceptual frameworks for understanding this instructional approach. Notably, the works of Reiser; Quintana et al.; Tabak and Sherin; and Reiser and Edelson offer insights into scaffolding within scientific inquiry-based learning. They discuss mechanisms such as *structuring* versus *problematizing* tasks (Reiser), a design framework for scaffolding tools (Quintana et al.), and concepts like *distributed scaffolding* and *synergy* (Tabak). Sherin proposes that scaffolding should be examined through the lens of learning interactions rather than merely software features.

2.1 Why Scaffolding?

English language teachers often face the challenge of addressing diverse learner backgrounds and varying levels of ability in the classroom. Scaffolding and differentiation are two of the most widely used strategies to meet students where they are and guide them toward their learning goals.

Scaffolding is especially critical in teaching English because language acquisition requires both understanding and application. Learners are more likely to engage and take risks when they are guided through vocabulary, concepts, and structures at their own level. When learners cannot comprehend a lesson, they cannot effectively learn. Scaffolding provides the support necessary to bridge that gap.

One simple but effective scaffolding strategy is activating prior knowledge. Asking learners about what they already know before introducing a topic helps them build on existing schemas. This can be done through warm-up questions or brief discussions, which also serve to enhance listening and speaking skills.

Another useful strategy is clearly stating the lesson objectives beforehand. For example, if students are expected to compare two types of cars, this goal should be communicated before the lesson begins. When students understand the purpose of a task, they can focus on key elements and filter out irrelevant information.

3. Practical Ideas

This section does not present empirical research data. Instead, it offers practical scaffolding activities tested during general English language classes with B1-level students at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (during the 2024/2025 academic year). The methods outlined below reflect modern second language (L2) teaching practices, with a focus on incorporating scaffolding at different stages of a lesson.

Activity 1

Stage: Presentation/Practice

Time: 20 minutes

Aim: To raise awareness of the difference between nouns and adjectives, using scaffolding techniques that progress from simple to complex tasks.

Procedure:

1. The teacher writes the following words on the board: *hope, painless, useful, use, danger, dirty, hopeful*.
2. Elicit the part of speech for each word.
3. Elicit common adjective-forming suffixes.
4. Students complete an activity from the student book (SB), page 38, exercise 1, and check their answers.
5. Distribute sentences that focus on key vocabulary. Students identify derivatives using appropriate suffixes.
6. Drill problematic sentences as needed.
7. In pairs, students complete a series of exercises involving modal verbs and sentence analysis:
 - Identify uses of modals (e.g., prohibition, obligation).
 - Present and check each other's understanding of modal usage in different contexts.
 - Engage in recall exercises using cue words (e.g., "prohibition", "no obligation").
 - Work with partners to identify and correct sentences, switching roles after each task.

Activity 2

Stage: Production

Time: 20 minutes

Aim: To encourage learners to speculate and use modals in both past and present contexts, through scaffolded group work.

Procedure:

1. Hand out slips of paper to students—two indicate that the holders may choose their group members; the rest have smiley faces.
2. Pre-teach key vocabulary: *compatriots, tension, anticipate, unleash, induce*.
3. Students receive incomplete parts of a story and, in groups, discuss and speculate on:
 - When and where the story occurred
 - Who the narrator might be
 - What happened
 - Why the narrator is sharing their experience
 - Any additional relevant information
 - *Focus:* Encourage the use of modals in the past and present for speculation.
4. Groups present their interpretations.
5. Students read the original story, compare it with their own versions, and reflect on which group's ideas were closest to the original.
6. A follow-up writing task encourages learners to apply the structures and vocabulary used during the activity.

4. Conclusions

The integration of scaffolding into second language instruction signifies a substantial evolution in the methodology of language education. It represents a shift from passive knowledge transmission to active, student-centered learning, where the role of the teacher is to guide rather than dictate. Through scaffolding, learners are supported in ways that meet their individual needs, allowing them to gradually gain the confidence and competence necessary to function independently in the target language.

As this article has discussed, scaffolding is not a single strategy but a comprehensive framework that can be tailored to different learning styles, classroom contexts, and linguistic goals. Its flexibility allows educators to differentiate instruction, address varying levels of proficiency, and provide meaningful learning experiences that are both challenging and accessible. Whether through activating prior knowledge, structuring tasks in incremental stages, offering visual or verbal support, or guiding learners with thought-provoking questions, scaffolding empowers students to reach outcomes they might not achieve on their own.

Moreover, the theoretical perspectives outlined from scholars such as Bruner, Reiser, and Sherin further validate scaffolding's place within constructivist and socio-cultural models of learning. These frameworks emphasize the importance of interaction, collaboration, and the learner's active role in knowledge construction—principles that are especially relevant in the domain of second language acquisition.

The practical activities presented in this article demonstrate how scaffolding can be embedded into real-world ESL classrooms in ways that are not only pedagogically sound but also engaging and motivating for learners. By implementing such strategies, teachers can create a supportive learning environment that respects learners' developmental stages while still encouraging them to take linguistic risks and stretch beyond their current capabilities.

Looking ahead, the ongoing advancement of educational technologies and digital learning platforms presents exciting new opportunities for scaffolding. Online learning environments, interactive tools, and AI-driven resources can be designed to provide adaptive scaffolding, offering individualized support based on real-time learner performance.

In conclusion, scaffolding is more than a teaching technique—it is a mindset that values guided discovery, learner autonomy, and purposeful interaction. As language educators strive to meet the demands of increasingly diverse and dynamic classrooms, the principles of scaffolding offer a vital foundation for designing effective, inclusive, and responsive instruction. By embracing this approach, we are not only enhancing language acquisition but also fostering lifelong learning skills that transcend the classroom.

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