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# The Impact of Teachers' Scaffolding on Iranian High School Students' Reading Comprehension

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## Abstract

English language learners are one of the largest groups of students who struggle with literacy in general and comprehension in particular. What makes scaffolding so effective is that it enables a teacher to keep a task whole, while students learn to understand and manage the parts, and presents the learner with just the right challenge. In so doing, it helps students to cope with the complexity of tasks in an authentic manner (Pearson, 1996). This study is conducted in order to understand to what extent Iranian high school teachers' scaffolding has an effect on learners' reading comprehension. First-grade high school teachers were selected, in order to be observed for answering the question.

*Keywords:* Scaffolding Strategies; Teacher's scaffolding; Reading Comprehension.

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## 1. Introduction

Scaffolding has become one of the major issues with the work of Lev Vygotsky, with modern educators and researchers interested in continuing its development and application. Langford (2005) claimed that Vygotsky "coined the term scaffolding" (p.141). This statement, although figuratively defensible, is not literally accurate. The concept of scaffolding was related to, but not directly taken from, the writings of Vygotsky. Vygotsky, however, did not use the metaphor of scaffolding. Kaye (1970) planted the seeds for the concept of scaffolding by claiming that a child's problem solving is often assisted and supported by others who are more skillful. Wood and Middleton (1975) strengthened this argument: "...it is our contention that any process of rule induction or problem solving on [ the child's] part can, and indeed often must, be facilitated by the intervention of another who is more expert in the situation than [ the child] is" (p.181). Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) were the first to use the term scaffolding in elaboration of the role of tutoring on problem-solving behavior. They argued that the social context of tutoring goes for beyond modeling and imitation and "...involves a kind of "scaffolding" process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts." (p.90). While scaffolding and Vygotsky are now virtually synonymous, most authorities in the field are unsure of who first made the connection between them. The implicit connection would favor Bruner who was actively involved in the original scaffolding research and also a leading American Vygotskian scholar having written the introduction to the first English translation of Vygotsky's (1962) thought and language. Stone (1998) argues that Cazden (1979) first made the explicit connection between scaffolding and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in an unpublished

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technical report. Relatively little is known regarding Iranian high school teachers' use of specific scaffolds that may be important for students who are struggling to acquire language and literacy concepts.

## **2. Research questions**

The study focuses on answering the following question: To what extent do Iranian high schools English Teachers use scaffolding strategies during reading session?

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1. Participants*

Two first-grade high school teachers were selected, in order to be observed for answering the question. All of them have a Bachelor's degree in English. Teachers' experience in a high school setting ranged from 9 to 17 years. English is the second language for all teachers. High school was selected from district one in Tehran.

### *3.2. Instrumentation*

A self-made observation and interview chart form similar to the one in appendix A is created. It is a Likert-scale. Twelve scaffolding strategies are listed. They are selected, according to the chart of Clark and Graves (2005) with significant reliability. It is important to note that this is a list of possible components of scaffolding strategies. These charts were used once, for interviewing with each of two teachers, to find out their opinions regarding using each of the twelve scaffolding strategies noted in the chart.

### *3.3. Procedure*

For answering the question: to what extent teachers use scaffolding strategies in their reading session, a structured observation was done. In order to have access to the participants' motivation for their behaviors and actions, the researcher compared the results of observation with that of interview. So, before observing teachers' reading classes, they were interviewed (unstructured interview). They were asked about how they support students in order to improve and foster their reading comprehension. Then the classes were observed through an observation form that is given in Appendix A.

## **4. Results**

Results of the interview with the teachers who were engaged in scaffolding sessions - At this stage of the study, the researcher wanted to find out the knowledge regarding the scaffolding quality of performance in classes by the teachers before observing their true acts in their classes. At the first step both teachers answered to the questions in the interview session, through selecting one of the 5 levels (from 1 to 5). As it was described, scaffolding skills are related to the three periods of before, during and after passage reading interventions. Comparing the two charts (questionnaire and the class practices) shows that except in S1 and S3, other results of the interview and observation were the same. For the observation procedure, teachers made students to answer the questions (S10), and engaged their students in passage reading (S5) most frequently and such results were found in their interview.

## **5. Conclusion**

Scaffolding is the term introduced by Bruner (1986) to refer to the help given to a child by an adult, usually a talk that supports a child in carrying out an activity. Wood (1988), Bruner and Ross (1976) define scaffolding as a

metaphor for the interaction between an expert and a novice engaged in a problem- solving task or the adult controlling those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence (Hürsen, Ozcinar, Ozdamli & Uzunboylu, 2011; Ferreira, 2007; Karahoca & Uzunboylu, 2010). Ellis (2004) states the social dimension of the development of a new skill is handled in sociocultural theory through the notion of scaffolding. Scaffolding is the dialogic process by which one speaker assists another in performing a function that he or she cannot perform alone. In the words of Al-Jaafreh and Lantolf, (1992) scaffolding is defined as a mediating strategy which must be both leveled for the learner's apparent ZPD and helpful in overcoming the specific problems the learner has already displayed. (Ellis, 2004). Chi (2007) investigated and compared scaffolding strategies employed by two EFL teachers in the process of instructing learners, and tried to explore the most effective scaffolding strategies used by teachers to students. The results showed implementing scaffolding strategy effectively in the process of instruction students' reading comprehension upgraded students' reading comprehension.

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**Appendix A**

**Observation form**

(Source: Clark and Graves, 2005)

Highschool..... Grade(s).....observer.....  
 Teacher.....Lesson(min).....Visit No.....  
 Subject.....Date.....Page.....

Scaffolding strategies	Extremely low.	Low	Fair	High	Extremely high
Introducing pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching unknown vocabulary	S1	S2			
Activate background knowledge		S3			
Preview the passage					

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Other types of scaffolding	S4
	Engaging students in passage reading S5
During passage reading interventions	Have students generate questions S6
	Teach and promote the use of comprehension strategies S7
	Ask students questions to check their understanding S8
Other types of scaffolding	
	Engage students in a discussion S9
	Having students answer text question S10
After Passage reading interventions	Teach strategies for completing assignments S11
	Having students summarize information using writing S12

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