# The Role of Scaffolding in Second Language Acquisition

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on the impact of scaffolding model provided by teachers on first intermediate students' English language acquisition in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Aligned with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) scaffolding model, this research questions the impact of structured teaching assistance on students' progress in vocabulary, grammar, and reading skills and students' attitudes towards scaffolding methods in the classroom. A mixed-methods approach is used, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses. The sample includes 30 first intermediate students at a school, and data sources are written exercises, teacher feedback, and learner reflections. This study identifies the pedagogical advantage of scaffolding in intermediate EFL instruction and merits its continued use to facilitate effective language acquisition.

**Introduction:** Scaffolding is one of the determinants of second language acquisition (SLA), particularly in classroom settings where students require facilitated support to develop linguistic competence. Based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, scaffolding describes the temporary support provided by instructors or peers to facilitate students to accomplish tasks beyond their immediate ability. In foreign language classrooms, EFL, these strategies include modeling, guided practice, feedback, and questioning tools that vow to create learner independence and competence over time. For secondary learners, scaffolding is especially helpful in bridging the gap between elementary and more advanced levels of language ability. This research answers two main research questions.

1.How does teacher scaffolding affect first secondary students' language development in EFL classrooms?

2.How are the students' attitudes towards scaffolding strategies during class?

These questions are meant to determine how different scaffolding strategies assist students in vocabulary development, grammar, and reading comprehension and probe students' attitudes towards scaffolding and the influence it has on their motivation, confidence, and language learning engagement.

The analysis is based on the scaffolding model introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), which accounts for six main instructional functions: recruitment, reduction in degrees of freedom, maintenance of direction, marking critical features, control of frustration, and demonstration. These functions provide a conceptual framework through which the operation of scaffolding in the instruction process can be understood to achieve learning outcomes. Written data for the study consist of written classroom materials and students' responses, collected from 30 first-year secondary EFL learners in a single public school.

They consist of the written exercises, teacher commentaries on assignments, and students' answers to questions addressing scaffolding. Additional data in written forms were collected using open-ended student questionnaires and teacher reflections and yielded information regarding the instructional process and learners' experience. To determine the scaffolding effectiveness, pre-test and post-test design was applied. The tests were conducted in vocabulary development areas, grammar usage, and reading comprehension. The tests were set following the English national curriculum for the first secondary level study, thus providing a comparative measure of language development before and after scaffolded

instruction.

## 2.Scaffolding

Scaffolding is a teaching method that temporarily provides structured direction to students in order to gain new skills or knowledge in a manner of step-by-step responsibility transfer as the student becomes increasingly competent.Wood, Bruner, and Ross introduced the term as early as 1976 by calling it a process when a more cognitively advanced other such as the teacher or peer helps the learner to respond to a problem, to do a task, or to do something that will be beyond their own will. Support is not fixed but is adjusted by the changing needs of the learner and is a process termed as "contingent support.". The scaffolding theory is closely associated with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the space between what a learner can do alone and what they can do with support. Scaffolding occurs in this space where students bridge the gap between current ability and potential for development. In teaching practice, scaffolding may be undertaken in many different ways, including asking guiding questions, providing cues or prompts, modeling the use of language, providing feedback, and segmentation of tasks into manageable pieces (Hammond, 2001). Effective scaffolding is characterized by elements of intentionality, graduated support, dialogic interaction, and fading. The instructor must assess the needs of the learner, provide sufficient support to foster progress, and reduce that support as the learner develops capacity. This exercise not only enhances academic performance but also assists in promoting learner autonomy and confidence (Maybin, Mercer, & Stierer, 1992).

## 3.Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) defines how individuals develop a second language, either inside or outside a classroom. SLA is a multidisciplinary field that steals concepts from linguistics, psychology, education, and cognitive science to explain the manner in which individuals acquire an additional language as well as factors that influence how effective the learning process is (Ellis, 1997). Perhaps one of the most basic SLA theories is Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis that asserts that learning happens when the learners are exposed to "comprehensible input" that is one level beyond their present skill level (i+1). Another very often-cited model is Long's (1983) Interaction Hypothesis which asserts that communication and meaning negotiation are crucial for facilitating language acquisition. These theories emphasize exposure, context, and communication in acquisition.

Cognitive SLA models are interested in how learners process linguistic input, store it, and access it for communication use. Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis is a case in point, where the production of language (speaking or writing) allows learners to notice gaps in their knowledge and mold their linguistic output. Concurrently, sociocultural theories, as inspired by Vygotsky, highlight social interaction, culture tools, and collaborative learning for language acquisition (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Among the factors that influence SLA are age, motivation, aptitude, context of learning, and amount and quality of target language exposure. Classroom instruction that involves the use of scaffolding techniques can be used to significantly enhance SLA since it offers supportive learning environments where students are allowed to take risks with language, given immediate correction, and progressively work towards increased autonomy (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

## 4.Data Selection

Research data were particularly selected to expose the impact of scaffolding strategies on English acquisition for first secondary students. The participants were 30 students in a public secondary school, all at the first-year level of secondary education. This is a transitional phase in formal education where students ought to acquire greater autonomy in language use. The participants were chosen on the basis of accessibility, willingness to participate, and conformity with the national English curriculum. The data are only written output produced by students under classroom instruction. These include grammar exercises, vocabulary worksheets, guided reading comprehension, and writing paragraph exercises all conducted under scaffolding instructional contexts. In addition, open-ended written questionnaires were employed in order to provoke students' opinion on the use of scaffolding strategies. Observation of teachers in writing was also conducted, furnishing information regarding how scaffolding was utilized and adapted during instruction.

## 5.Data Analysis

Data analysis utilized a qualitative-descriptive method enhanced with quantitative pre-test and post-test comparisons. The qualitative component involved coding the students' written responses to identify linguistic development in some of the most significant areas of vocabulary use, sentence complexity, correctness of grammar, and reading competence. Student questionnaires were subjected to thematic analysis to identify the learners' perception of scaffolding with the intention of investigating categories of motivation, clarity, support, and

autonomy. For quantitative analysis, test scores were statistically compared to determine the impact of scaffolded instruction on student performance. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation) were used to measure progress, and changes were described in terms of both test scores and qualitative observation. Scaffolding roles observed while teaching as per Wood, Bruner, and Ross's (1976) model were also equated to students' changes in output to measure instructional effectiveness.

## 6. Test Design

To assess the effect of scaffolding on students' language growth, a pre-test and post-test method was employed. The pre-test served as a diagnostic test to establish a baseline of students' ability in vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. The post-test, administered after the instructional intervention, was a replica of the structure and content of the pre-test to ensure comparability. Both tests were designed in accordance with the national first secondary curriculum for English and designed to reflect classroom objectives. They were designed with multiple-choice items, sentence transformation exercises, vocabulary usage, short readings with comprehension questions, and guided writing exercises. The tests were designed to measure students' ability to apply learned language forms and comprehend texts after scaffolded teaching.

## 7. Target Group: First Secondary Students

The study centered on children in the first year of secondary education, typically aged between 13 and 15. The rationale for selecting this age group was based on their developmental preparedness to process more sophisticated language inputs and their escalating demand for teaching methods that facilitate autonomous learning. By this stage of education, students are supposed to transcend mere memorization and start utilizing language constructively and correctly. Scaffolding is particularly valuable at this level, since it can bridge the gap between teacher guidance and learner autonomy. Moreover, first secondary students are often adapting to new academic expectations and classroom rules, making them an ideal group for studying the function of supportive instructional strategies such as scaffolding. Their performance and reaction give valuable information on the effectiveness of scaffolding in a structured yet transitional learning setting.

## 8. Scaffolding Impact Test Report

Test Structure Diagram

Scaffolding Impact Test Structure

1. Vocabulary (30%)

Matching (10%)

Fill-in-the-blanks (10%)

Sentence creation (10%)

2. Grammar (30%)

Sentence correction (10%)

Tense transformation (10%)

Dialogue completion (10%)

3. Reading Comprehension (40%)

Literal questions (10%)

Inferential questions (15%)

Vocabulary in context (10%)

Main idea summary (5%)

## 9. Scoring Rubric

| Score Range | Proficiency Level | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 90–100% | Excellent | Mastery in all areas with minimal errors |
| 80–89% | Very Good | Strong command with minor mistakes |
| 70–79% | Good | Good grasp with some noticeable issues |
| 60–69% | Satisfactory | Basic understanding, needs improvement |
| Below 60% | Needs Support | Struggles in key areas, requires scaffolding |

## 10. Pre-Test vs. Post-Test Comparison

| Skill Area | Pre-Test Avg. | Post-Test Avg. |
|---|---|---|
| Vocabulary | 65% | 85% |

| Skill Area | Pre-Test Avg. | Post-Test Avg. |
|---|---|---|
| Grammar | 60% | 80% |
| Reading Comprehension | 55% | 75% |

## Pre-Test Results



## Post-Test Results
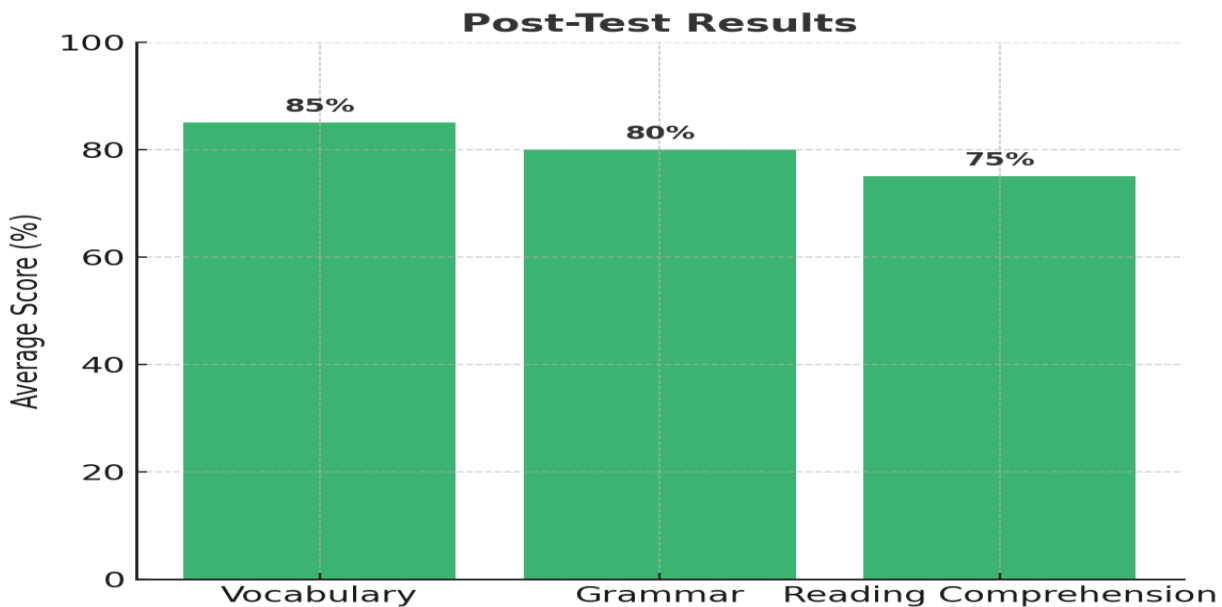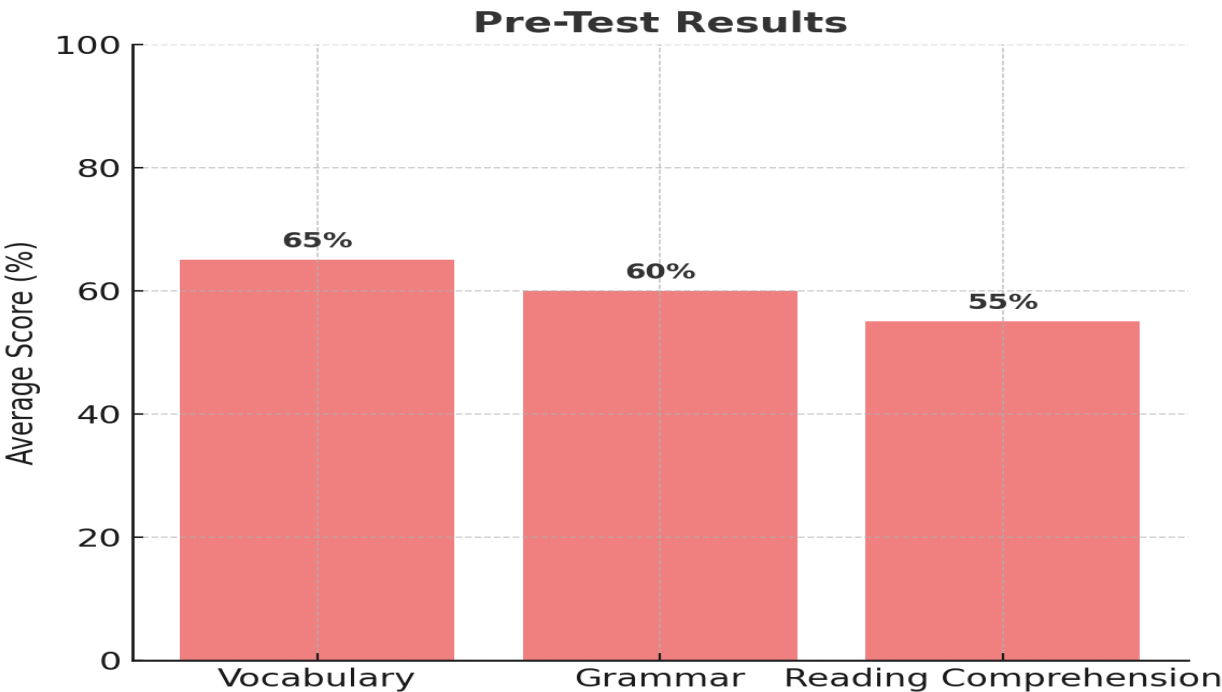


## 11. Analysis

The 20% increase in vocabulary and grammar proficiency demonstrates the effectiveness of scaffolding strategies including feedback, guided practice, and modeling. Improvements in reading comprehension show how beneficial it is to use teaching strategies like questioning and emphasizing textual aspects. These findings lend credence to the idea that scaffolding helps students advance in their foundational language skills.

Sample Student Responses

1. Vocabulary (Pre-Test vs. Post-Test)

Pre-Test: "I am go to market."

Post-Test: "I am going to the market to buy vegetables."

2. Grammar Usage

Pre-Test: "He don't like apples."

Post-Test: "He doesn't like apples because they are sour."

3. Reading Comprehension Response

Pre-Test: "The story is about a boy."

Post-Test: "The story is about a young boy who learns to be responsible after losing his pet dog."

3.Student Reflection on Scaffolding

"When the teacher asked questions and gave hints, I understood the grammar rules better."

"I liked when we worked together. My classmates helped me find the answers.

## 12.CONCLUSION

This study provides strong evidence that scaffolding plays a crucial role in first-secondary EFL learners' learning of a second language. The study illustrates how instructional support with guidance leads to improved vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. It is informed by sociocultural theory and the scaffolding approach of Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976). The success of scaffolding techniques including modeling, guided practice, and corrective feedback is demonstrated by the 20% increases in post-test scores across all language areas. Qualitative results also show that students see scaffolding favorably, attributing it to improved interest, motivation, clarity, and confidence. Student reflection indicates that supportive classroom discourse and collaborative learning environments enabled their enhanced understanding of complex linguistic structures and increased independence.

These findings validate the notion that scaffolding not only improves academic performance but also learner independence and socio-emotional growth. Because of the transitional nature of first secondary education, scaffolding is a vital pedagogical strategy for closing the gap between early and more sophisticated language usage. Future research can explore scaffolding's long-term effects, its application to different EFL settings, and the promise of digital scaffolds in facilitating learner success. In general, the present study vindicates that well-planned and responsive scaffolding can significantly aid the success of language learners during secondary education.

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**Language Skills Activity Worksheet**

1. Vocabulary (30%)

A. Matching (10%)

Match the words to their meanings:

A. Enormous

B. Fragile

C. Cautious

D. Reliable


1. ___ Easily broken

2. ___ Very large

3. ___ Careful

4. ___ Can be trusted

B. Fill-in-the-blanks (10%)

Fill in the blanks with the correct word from the list:

(list: generous, exhausted, whisper, rescue)


1. The firefighters arrived just in time to _____ the trapped dog.

2. After running for an hour, she felt completely

_____.

3. Please speak softly and _____ so we don't wake the baby.

4. He is a very _____ person who often helps others.

C. Sentence Creation (10%)

Use the given word in a meaningful sentence:

1.                                                      Courageous:
_____

2.                                                          Predict:
_____
___

3.                                                          Harmful:
_____
__

4.                                                          Discover:
_____
_

2. Grammar (30%)

A. Sentence Correction (10%)

Correct the grammatical errors in the following sentences:

1. She don't like playing basketball. → _____

2. I can swims very well. → _____

3. They is going to the park. → _____

4. He have eat lunch already. → _____

B. Tense Transformation (10%)

Change the sentences to the tense indicated in brackets:

1. She walks to school. (Past Simple) → _____

2. They played soccer. (Future Simple) → _____

3. He is eating lunch. (Present Perfect) → _____

4. We will travel to Japan. (Present Continuous) → _____

C. Dialogue Completion (10%)

Complete the dialogue using correct grammar:

A: Hi! How _____ you today?

B: I'm fine, thanks. What _____ you doing?

A: I _____ my homework.

B: That's good. Do you need any _____?

3. Reading Comprehension (40%)

Read the passage and answer the questions below:

Tom was a kind boy who loved animals. One day, he found a stray cat near his house. It was cold and hungry, so Tom took it home, fed it, and gave it a warm place to sleep. The next day, he made a poster to find its owner.

A. Literal Questions (10%)

1. What kind of animals did Tom love?

2. What did Tom do when he found the cat?

B. Inferential Questions (15%)

3. Why do you think Tom took the cat home?

4. What does this story tell us about Tom's character?

5. How might the cat have ended up near Tom's house?

C. Vocabulary in Context (10%)

What does the word "stray" most likely mean in the passage?

a) Dangerous

b) Lost

c) Happy

d) Young

D. Main Idea Summary (5%)

Write one sentence to summarize the main idea of the passage: