The Importance of Instructional Scaffolding in ESL Classroom

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Abstract

Instructional scaffolding is a pedagogical approach that facilitates learning through engaging, relevant, and carefully designed activities that efficiently develop the student's skills and knowledge. In an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, instructional scaffolding is a valuable tool in helping students overcome the challenges associated with learning a new language, and thus consequently promotes language acquisition. In this article, the author will define instructional scaffolding and point out the importance of this pedagogical approach in the ESL classroom, the strategies for its implementation, and the challenges and considerations of instructional scaffolding in the ESL classroom.

Ⅰ. Literature Review

The instructional scaffolding process is a pedagogical approach widely utilized in various academic settings, including English as a Second Language (ESL), that aims to provide learners with the necessary support to develop skills and knowledge. The following literature review presents the definition of instructional scaffolding, its key features, and its efficacy in improving ESL students' language learning and acquisition.

The term "scaffolding" comes from the construction industry, where temporary structures are used to support workers as they build a building. In the same way, the instructional scaffolding pedagogical approach provides temporary support to learners as they work towards mastering a newly acquired concept or skill. It divides complex tasks into smaller, more

practicable methods. This pedagogical approach aims to help students reach a level of understanding and independence that is not initially achievable on their own. Henceforth, the procedures in this approach ensure that the learners receive support and guidance as they progress in their skills and knowledge.

Learning occurs through interactions with more knowledgeable others as they can provide the necessary support and guidance（Vygotsky, 1978）. This concept is the basis of instructional scaffolding as the latter seeks to build upon the learners' pre-existing knowledge by providing them with the necessary support to acquire new skills and knowledge. Hence, the key feature of this approach involves assessment of prior knowledge to identify what the leaners already know about a particular topic（Chen, Chen, & Tsai, 2019）. Afterwards, the teacher divides the learning tasks into smaller, more practicable stages （Usher & Pajares, 2021）. Then, the teacher provides the learners with instructions and guidance which could involve modeling, giving examples, providing feedback, or offering prompts to help students think through a task （Dembo & Seli, 2017）. Thenceforth, as the learners become more comfortable with the task and confident with their responses, the teacher gradually reduces the amount of guidance and support in a process called "fading"（Bodrova & Leong, 2017）. Finally, the learners practice on their own while the teacher provides feedback as needed（Butler & Winne, 2018）.

Research has shown that instructional scaffolding is an effective approach to overcome challenges in second language learning and promote language acquisition（Wachyunni, 2016）. As the approach uses scaffolds that may involve various tools and strategies such as pre-teaching vocabulary, modeling, graphic organizers, guided practice, questioning, feedback, and gradual transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the learner（Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2014）, the learners receive thorough guidance and instructions until they reach a level of knowledge, skills and abilities that allow them independence.

A study conducted by Wang & Wen（2002）found that instructional scaffolding positively impacted students' learning and language acquisition. The study involved 80 fifth-grade students in Taiwan who were taught English language reading comprehension using a scaffolded approach. The scaffolding process consisted of a series of carefully sequenced and progressively challenging instructional activities. The study showed that the use of

instructional scaffolding significantly improved the students' reading comprehension and oral communication skills.

Another study by Kim (2015) found that instructional scaffolding was beneficial to the development of the academic language literacy of ESL learners. The study was focused on the effects of instructional scaffolding on the academic language development of 24 ESL students who were taking an academic writing course in a university in the United States. The students were given scaffolding that included pre-writing activities, individual meetings with the teacher, and peer review sessions. The study observed that the use of scaffolding improved the learners' academic language skills, including their ability to use complex sentence structures and academic vocabulary in writing.

A quasi-experimental-designed study by Wang & Li (2019) investigated the effects of scaffolded instructions on the writing skills of the ESL students at a junior high school in China. The study had a treatment group that received scaffolded instructions such as pre-writing activities, guided writing, and teacher and peer feedback, and a control group who received traditional instructions. The results of the study indicated that instructional scaffolding was efficient in improving the English writing skills of the students, particularly in organization and coherence.

Mattheoudakis and Ravanis (2020) compared the effects of traditional instruction with those that utilized scaffolding strategies such as modeling, guided exercises and teacher and peer feedback in ESL students at a primary school classroom in Greece. The study observed that the group of students who received scaffolded instructions performed better in vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. A similar study by Aksu and Kuruyer (2017) indicated that scaffolded instructions such as pre-teaching of vocabulary, use of graphic organizers and immediate teacher and peer feedback improved the reading comprehension skill of Turkish EFL students.

Instructional scaffolding is a pedagogical strategy that offers learners with temporary guidance and support whilst they work toward mastery of a new skill or concept. According to Vygotsky's (1978) theory, learning transpires through interactions with individuals who possess more knowledge, as they are able to provide the essential support and guidance required for effective learning. This pedagogical approach involves identifying the learners' prior

schemata, dividing complex tasks into smaller and more practicable stages, providing guidance and feedback, gradually decreasing the amount of support as the learners become more independent and confident in their newly acquired skill. The literature review establishes that the instructional scaffolding pedagogical approach is an efficacious methodology that promotes student learning and language acquisition in ESL classrooms. The studies about instructional scaffolding efficacy in ESL classrooms substantiated that the approach positively impacted students' learning and language acquisition, and improved reading comprehension, writing, and academic language skills. Learners receive systematic guidance and instructions in scaffolding approach until they achieve a level of independence in their learning that was not initially achievable on their own. Therefore, instructional scaffolding has a great potential to enhance the language learning experience and improve language outcomes of ESL students.

Ⅱ. Strategies for Implementation

Scaffolding involves providing learners with tasks, support and guidance that are at the appropriate level so the students can progress to a higher level of proficiency and mastery. Hence, strategies to implement instructional scaffolding are important because they help learners to gradually develop their understanding and skills in a particular subject or task. Here are some key reasons that instructional scaffolding strategies are important:

1. Facilitating learning. Scaffolding enables learners to build on their current knowledge and abilities while gradually developing their comprehension and competency in a specific topic or task.
2. Increasing interest and motivation. Appropriate amount of guidance, particularly at the early stage of learning a new concept, ensures learners' motivation and interest.
3. Promoting critical thinking. Scaffolding helps students make connections between various ideas and concepts by encouraging them to think more critically about the subject matter.
4. Encouraging collaboration. Scaffolding is a collaborative strategy in which students solve problems or complete tasks while learning from one another.

5. Addressing diverse learner needs. Instructional scaffolding can be tailored to provide individualized support and guidance for different learning needs.

Utilizing instructional scaffolding strategies can contribute in the creation of a more effective and interesting learning experience, and also ensuring that learners attain their full potential.

There are several strategies that can be employed to implement instructional scaffolding strategies in ESL classrooms. The following are a few examples of scaffolding strategies:

1. Pre-teaching vocabulary. Identify key vocabulary and introduce them using visuals, realistic examples, or real-life examples. Provide opportunities for students to practice using the appropriate vocabulary through matching games, vocabulary quizzes, or sentence completion exercises. Students can also better understand the connections between words and concepts by using graphic organizers. These tools can also be useful for those who learn best visually. Teach new vocabulary explicitly by breaking the word into its parts and explaining the meaning of each part. Also, give examples and non-examples of how the word can be used in context. Model how to use the new vocabulary in context by using it in sentences and giving examples of how the word is used in everyday speech. Repetition is key to learning new vocabulary. Use a variety of activities to reinforce the new vocabulary, such as word games, role plays, and vocabulary quizzes. Gradually turn responsibility over to students, giving them less and less support as they become more familiar with the new words. Start with explicit instruction and modeling and then gradually move to activities where students can use the new words independently.

2. Provide visual aids. Visual aids help illustrate complex concepts, facilitate understanding, and provide a means for scaffolding instruction. Introduce visual aids to language learners by explaining their purpose and how they will be used to support their learning. Explain the visuals in simple and concise language appropriate to the students' language proficiency. Use interactive activities such as describing what is in the visual aids or making predictions about the study topics so students can interact with the visual aids and build interests and encourage active learning.

3. Simplify language. Simplified language in ESL classroom makes the

learning materials more accessible to the students. Activate the learners' prior knowledge, then build on what the students already know. Initially, use simple language structures and concepts the students are familiar with, then gradually introduce more complex language and ideas. Follow this up by providing context for the language being used using real-life examples, stories, or scenarios to help the students understand the relevance of the language and make it more meaningful to them. Repeat key words and concepts several times in different contexts to help students retain the material.

4. Sentence frames. Scaffolding sentence frames in the ESL classroom involves gradually increasing the complexity of the sentence frames as students become more proficient in English. Start with simple sentence frames that only require a word or two to be filled in. "I like ~" would be a good starting point for beginner-level students. Gradually increase the complexity of the sentence frames by adding more words or clauses. Make the students share their sentence frames with each other to provide language practice in a meaningful way and build their confidence. Adjust the level of difficulty of the sentence frames as needed to ensure that students are challenged but not overwhelmed.

5. Use real-world examples. Learning takes place quickly when students understand the relevance of the study materials to their own experiences. Clearly identify the language structures students need to learn and acquire, for instance, how to ask for directions, make requests or reservations, express complaints, or describe a process. This will make selecting real-world examples easier and more appropriate. Use a video clip, audio recording, or transcript from a conversation to model language function in context. By doing so, students will be able to see how language functions are used in the real world. Provide controlled activities that will encourage students to practice the language through guided learning. Use role-plays or simulations to provide authentic activities where students can practice using the language function in a more realistic and meaningful way.

6. Scaffold writing activities. Break down the writing process into smaller steps. Provide a writing sample where students can learn the features of the writing genre they are expected to complete. Divide the writing task

into smaller steps and provide explicit instructions for each step. A template or a graphic organizer can help guide the students through the structure of the writing task. To create a framework for writing tasks, the students' prior schemata can be activated to know how familiar they are already with the topic. Give students a list of useful vocabulary and phrases related to the writing topic and a checklist of the grammar rules the written material must follow. Put the students in pairs or groups to encourage peer collaboration so they can learn from each other, share ideas, and provide feedback on each other's work. Provide regular feedback on students' completed written tasks. Make sure to identify the students' strengths and weaknesses in writing. Allow a few chances for revisions so students are given the chance to refine their ideas and improve the clarity of their writing.

Instructional scaffolding strategies are valuable for effective teaching in ESL learning environments. The strategies mentioned can be adapted to meet the needs of students at different levels of proficiency and help develop language skills in a more engaging and meaningful way. These strategies can also help ESL students to become more confident and successful language learners.

Ⅲ. Challenges of Scaffolded Instruction in ESL Classroom

There are several challenges and considerations associated with implementing the instructional scaffolding pedagogy in an ESL classroom.

Firstly, identifying learners' prior schemata and understanding may take time, and teachers should be well-trained to conduct the assessment effectively. Secondly, the ability to determine the level of support the learners need, deliver instructions, do expert modeling, and efficiently give feedback may also require language and specialized teaching proficiency in ESL. Furthermore, it is important that the scaffolded instructions both facilitate learning and promote learners' independence, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Finally, the successful execution of an instructional scaffolding pedagogical approach in ESL classrooms requires careful planning, preparation and coordination. Scaffolded instructions require constant monitoring and

assessment to make effective modifications. Hence, the learning objectives must consistently correspond with the learners' needs and abilities in order to design relevant and effective scaffolded instructions.

The use of instructional scaffolding in ESL classrooms can be an effective pedagogical strategy for promoting language acquisition and learning; however, teachers need to be aware of the challenges and considerations associated with its implementation including assessment of prior schemata, appropriate level of support and guidance, language proficiency, promotion learning autonomy, and careful planning and evaluation.

Ⅳ. Conclusion

The use of instructional scaffolds in ESL classrooms is a proven pedagogical approach that promotes language acquisition as shown by the literature review. The scaffolding process helps learners acquire knowledge and skills by providing temporary support in the form of guidance and feedback from a teacher or more knowledgeable peer. Dividing the tasks into smaller, more manageable steps allows learners to develop their language abilities according to their comfort and knowledge levels.

Instructional scaffolding involves assessing prior knowledge, dividing learning tasks into smaller stages, providing guidance and feedback, gradually decreasing support, and allowing learners to practice independently. The use of scaffolding strategies such as pre-teaching vocabulary, modeling, graphic organizers, guided practice, questions, and feedback have been found to be effective in promoting language acquisition among English as a Second Language learners.

A number of studies have demonstrated that instructional scaffolding has the potential to overcome challenges in second language learning, including developing academic language literacy, improving reading comprehension, and developing writing skills. According to these studies, instructional scaffolding is an effective pedagogical method that can improve language acquisition and academic performance in ESL classes.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that effective instructional scaffolding requires careful planning and consideration of the learners' needs, strengths,

and weaknesses. Teachers need to have a deep understanding of their students' prior knowledge and abilities to tailor the scaffolding process effectively. Furthermore, they must provide timely feedback and support to students as they progress through the scaffolding stages. Another consideration in implementing instructional scaffolding is the need for flexibility. As all learners have different needs and abilities, a teacher must be flexible when adjusting the scaffolding process according to the circumstances of each student.

Finally, instructional scaffolding should not be a permanent feature of the classroom. The aim ultimately is to gradually reduce the level of support and guidance, leading to the development of independent learning. Scaffolding is designed to facilitate a student's learning process by recognizing when students are ready to work independently and when scaffolding should be removed.

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