



# The effect of scaffolding on Iranian students of advanced level in English writing system

Seyyed Ali Kazemi<sup>1</sup>, Leila Zarei<sup>1</sup> and Lotfallah Dashti<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of ELT, Yasuj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Yasuj, Iran.

<sup>2</sup>Farhangian University, Yasuj, Iran.

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received: 13 April 2014;

Received in revised form:

20 July 2014;

Accepted: 30 July 2014;

### Keywords

Scaffolding,  
English,  
Passage.

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of scaffolding on Iranian students of advanced level in English writing system. Participants are 30 students who were studying passage one in an institute in NourAbad, Iran. This study was conducted to determine whether the scaffolding affect on their writing ability. Data were collected using language proficiency test. Then data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings indicate that scaffolding can improve students' writing ability and help them to write more effectively.

© 2014 Elixir All rights reserved.

## Introduction

Writing is one of the most important skills in SLA so paying attention to this skill is very crucial. Writing is a complex and difficult work. Iranian students make some common mistakes in writing because they enter some native habits in English writing specially in using prepositions and make their writing odd. Instruction in writing has an important role in second language education (weigle, 2002). These days there are a lot of interests in using new theoretical approaches for writing and teaching second language writing and how they can achieve this goal (Hyland, 2009). One of the ways is scaffolding. The purpose of scaffolding is helping learners to do successfully. It helps learners to move from the 'zone of actual development' to the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky 1978).

Raimes, (1983) states process writing focused on how the writer writes, where ideas collect, how developed, and what stages of composing involve. There are two kinds of writing productive writing and process writing. They are in contrast with each other. Productive writing is a traditional approach, like grammar-translation method.

In this study, it is explained how a group of advanced levels students can write very well. Here scaffolding according to Vygotskian sociocultural theory is used.

The purpose is to teach the students how to create ideas, organize, draft, and edit their writings within the scaffolding principles for example, contextualizing, continuity, inter subjectivity and handover, by using Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), to solve the problem of writing among students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at an institute in NourAbad. So, 30 out of 55 students will randomly select and it will divide to two groups, one control and one experimental, and scaffolding will give to the experimental group but the control group won't have any treatment. After that an independent sample t-test will give to compare the post-test mean scores of two groups. So, the purpose of this study is the effect of using scaffolding on the writing performance of students.

## Review of literature

Bruner (1978) believed that for learning, appropriate social interactional framework is needed. The teacher should always be one step ahead of the child (Vygotsky's zone of proximal development), and use contexts that are familiar to facilitate learning.

Applebee and Langer (1983) used instructional scaffolding to describe essential aspects of formal instruction. In their view, learning is a process of gradual internalization of routines and procedures available to the learner from the social and cultural context in which the learning takes place. In instructional scaffolding the language learner used a new task Scaffolding is provided by leading or probing questions to extend or elaborate the knowledge the learner already possesses. Rather than evaluating the learner's answers, the teacher is supporting, encouraging, and providing additional props. As the learner's competence grows, so the scaffolding is gradually reduced until the learner is able to function autonomously in that task and generalize to similar circumstances.

### Free Writing

Free writing is related to the process of writing which is more important than the product of writing. Writing is a tool for learning and self-discovery, not just a means to demonstrate learning. So free writing can have different forms such as creative writing, diaries, journal writing, dialogue journals, writing a new version of a story, or rewriting the ending of a book. A process approach to teaching writing emphasizes the development in learners of the recursive strategies and techniques that writers use when composing. The process of writing is cognitive (Raimes,1983).

### Structured Writing

"Structured writing" referred to drill-and practice, involving copying sentences, paragraphs, or essays, and correcting errors. In the past, teaching of writing focused on the production of texts by individual students, often in specific time and usually in silence. But now it is understood that writing is a process of creating and extending meaning, rather than conveying information (Applebee, 2000).

Recently there has been a tendency to consider a more sociocultural orientation. Lantolf said that learning and teaching

are social activities so sociocultural theorists paid attention to the mental activity among learners. Mind does not work alone and in writing students work together to make a text. Thus, collaborative problem-solving, brainstorming, shared planning, multiple drafts, peer feedback, revision, are some examples of process writing.

Scaffolding is a teaching strategy from Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). "The zone of proximal development is the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance" (Raymond, 2000, p.176). The scaffolding teaching strategy supports individual based on the learner's ZPD (Chang, Sung, & Chen, 2002). In scaffolding instruction a knowledgeable person supports the learner's development. The scaffold helps a student to internalize new information.

According to Vygotsky scaffolding is the role of teachers in supporting the learner's development and providing support structures to get to that next stage. An important aspect of scaffolding instruction is that the scaffolds are temporary. As the learner's abilities increase the scaffolding provided by the more knowledgeable person and finally he becomes professional.

Leo Van Lier (1996) has formulated six principles of scaffolding:

- Contextual report a safe but challenging environment: errors are expected and accepted as part of the learning process
- Continuity - repeated occurrences over time of a complex of actions, keeping a balance between routine and variation
- Intersubjectivity - mutual engagement and support: two minds thinking as one
- Flow – communication between participants is not forced, but flow in a natural way
- Contingency – the scaffolded assistance depends on learners' reactions: elements can be added, changed, deleted, repeated, etc
- Handover – the ZPD closes when learner is ready to undertake similar tasks without help (Van Lier, 1996, p. 196).

#### **Research question**

Does scaffolding influence on Iranian advanced level students on writing skill?

#### **Directional hypothesis**

Scaffolding in the classroom has a positive effect on writing skill among Iranian advanced level.

#### **Methodology**

##### **Subjects**

The subjects in this study were advanced students who were studying Passages 1 in an institute in Nour Abad. The subjects were both male and female aged 19-24.

First a pretest was given to them. It had 15 questions. After that 30 out of 55 were randomly selected and they divided into two groups, one experimental and one control group.

##### **Instrument**

The researcher used certain instruments to measure the subjects' abilities in language proficiency and writing ability. The first instrument was language proficiency test that was given to the students to choose 30 students. Then a test of writing was administered to all 30 subjects in both experimental and control groups to check any significant difference between the two groups. The subjects were asked to write about 100 words in 25 minutes about the effect of music on psychological problems. After that a post-test was administered to both control and experimental groups to measure their writing performance after the treatment. The subjects were asked to write an essay about 250 words in 45 minutes about the previous topic.

Because the scoring of writing is subjective, Jacobs, an analytic rating scale, was used in this study. Five aspects of writing are important. They are content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

#### **Procedure**

The first important thing is homogeneity of the subjects so a language proficiency test was administered to 70 subjects about their English proficiency level. In this language proficiency test the students had to answer the reading and writing questions in the particular time, then according to the subjects scores distribution, 55 out of 70 subjects whose scores fell one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen as the main subjects of the study and were randomly assigned to two groups, one control and one experimental, with 15 students in each.

The inter-rater reliability of writing section was calculated too. To do so, the writing section was rated by the researcher and another trained instructor and after making sure of the internal consistency between the two raters, the obtained score of each subject was considered as the average of the scores given by the two raters.

Then a test of writing was administered to all 30 subjects in both experimental and control groups before the treatment to check any significant difference between the two groups. The subjects of both groups were asked to write an essay about 100 words in 25 minutes on the topic of the effect of music on psychological problems. After that their scores were put into an independent sample t-test to make sure that there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of their essay writing ability before the treatment. Two raters scored the writings in this study. Both assessors used the same rating scale. The conditions of the two groups was the same including gender, aged from 19 to 24, the number of sessions, hours, the time of test, the pretest questions and also the writing topics.

In the control group, first the teacher introduced the introduction part and then in the body part they learned how to support their claims in the introduction part and in the last part including conclusion, they must have got the purpose of the essay. The teacher also taught the students how to generate ideas, structure and edit their essays. The students learned this process in a traditional way. The students were sitting like an exam session, thinking and jotting down sentences on and off. If they had any questions, they could silently ask the teacher. The finished essay should be read loudly for the students in the class and they could revise it at home and hand in the essay next session to teacher. The teacher emphasized correct spelling, appropriate use of grammar and lexicon, and a good range of vocabulary as the elements of good writing product.

The condition of the control group was exactly like the experimental group but the students in the control group did not receive scaffolding as a treatment in all process of essay writing in the classroom. They did not do any team or group work in the writing process in the classroom and wrote individually.

In the experimental group like the control group, first the researcher taught the students how to write a five paragraph essay that the students learned how they should state their claim as a thesis statement, then in three other paragraphs they must support their thesis statement and in the last paragraph including conclusion they must show the essay's purpose.

After receiving instruction in writing in both control and experimental groups and receiving treatment in only experimental group, all the subjects in both groups had to write an essay about 250 words in 45 minutes which was given as a post-test to both groups to compare the performance of the two groups in order to measure the effect of the treatment and test

the null hypothesis of the study. The scores were obtained through the ratings of the students' performance on the post-test by two raters that were trained in some sessions and through a team work they rated some samples in order to increase the amount of inter-rater consistency. The raters used the same writing rating scale. The average score given by two raters to each subject was considered as the final score of each and every individual.

### Results

To understand the effect of the independent variable (Scaffolding) on the dependent variable of English Writing, different descriptive and inferential statistics were used. They analyze the obtained data which consisted of the subjects' scores on the pretest proficiency used for homogenizing the participants and writing before the treatment and finally their scores on the writing posttest. In this study, experimental groups and language proficiency was the control variables because the researchers homogenized the participants according to their overall language proficiency.

### Discussion and conclusion

Writing has always been a difficult skill for learners to master but it has been always essential. Educators have been searching for new methods to improve learners' writing ability. The idea of an innovative method in this concern which was the use of Vygotsky's theory in sociocultural which was called scaffolding principles were brought into focus in this study.

A null hypothesis was finding out whether using scaffolding in the classroom would have any impact on the subjects' writing. It was guessed that the subjects in the experimental group might improve in their writing performance more than those in the control group who did not receive treatment period.

In this article, educators focused on writing and scaffolding and have stressed their importance to the development of ESL students. Writing effectively is one of the most important skills for EFL learners. However, finding ways and means of improving the writing abilities of EFL learners seems to be the crucial part for language teachers. Since the studies found a strong relationship between scaffolding and EFL learners English writing the researcher taught and practiced scaffolding principles as the treatment for the experimental group. The subjects in the experimental group had more instruction than those in the control group. In contrast, some of the control group subjects were passive and followed traditional structures in performing assignments.

### Reference

*International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 1 No. 16; November 2011 ( Scaffolding to Improve Reading Comprehension and to Write a Scholarly Research Paper )

2. *Reflections on English Language Teaching, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 43-54*  
(A Sociocultural Perspective on Second Language Acquisition: The Effect of High-structured Scaffolding versus Low-structured Scaffolding on the Writing Ability of EFL Learners)
3. *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences, 5(12): 2265-2273, 2011*  
(The Impact of Scaffolding on the Iranian EFL Learners' English Academic Writing)
4. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 934-940, J*  
(The Effect of Scaffolding Technique in Journal Writing among the Second Language Learners)
5. *The Journal of Teaching Language Skills (JTLS) Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 2010, Ser. 59/4*  
(L2 Discourse Co-construction within the Learner's ZPD)
6. *Learning Research and Development Center, 3939 O\_Hara Street, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA*  
Accepted 7 February 2005  
(Scaffolding writing and rewriting in the discipline: A web-based reciprocal peer review system)
7. *Jung-Sook (Sue) Lim, Dr Chris Campbell, Dr Simone Smala. School of Education. The University of Queensland*  
(Technology enhanced scaffolding in Language Teaching: Using LessonLAMS for Korean as a foreign language)
8. *Monica Gavota, Mireille Bétrancourt, Daniel Schneider, Urs Richle. University of Geneva, 54 Route des Acacias, 1227 Carouge*  
(Scaffolding for computer supported writing to learn activities in vocational training)
9. *Ilya M. Goldin<sup>1,2</sup>, Kevin D. Ashley<sup>1,2,3</sup> 1 Intelligent Systems Program 2 Learning Research & Development Center 3 School of Law University of Pittsburgh Pittsburgh, PA {goldin,ashley}@pitt.edu*  
(Eliciting Informative Feedback in Peer Review: Importance of Problem-Specific Scaffolding)
10. *The Iranian EFL Journal September 2010 Volume 6 Issue 3*  
(2. Mansoor Fahim, Parviz Maftoon and Hossein Hashemnezhad 7 - 27  
Types and Amounts of Original vs. Modified Descriptions of Scaffolding in EFL Writing Ability)
11. *Shari L. Jackson, Joseph Krajcik, Elliot Soloway College of Engineering, School of Education, School of Information University of Michigan 1101 Beal Ave. Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA*  
(The Design of Guided Learner-Adaptable Scaffolding in Interactive Learning Environments)