

# The Practical Use and Impact of Scaffolding in Chinese ESL Preschool

Xiangning Li<sup>1, †</sup> Shitong Zhao<sup>2, \*, †</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Education, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield, Yorkshire, England

<sup>2</sup>School of Education, Newcastle University, Newcastle, Tyne and Wear, England

\*Corresponding author. Email: b8066332@newcastle.ac.uk

<sup>†</sup>Those authors contributed equally.

## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to study the practical significance and influence of scaffolding in Chinese Preschool English learning. Firstly, it introduces the research background and preliminary inference in this field, and introduces the description of a series of research methods, such as data collection and analysis process. The limitations of this study are put forward. The specific implementation method is to transcribe the language interaction between teachers and students in the classroom, and analyze these dialogues with scientific methods. At the same time, the transcripts of the surveyed students before and after the scaffolding teaching method were compared. Finally, interviews were conducted with teachers and students to analyze the attitudes of students and teachers towards scaffolding. The data show that students' test scores have been significantly improved. Through the evaluation methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis, it is further concluded that scaffolding teaching method can help students learn high-level phonics, play a role that can not be ignored, and stimulate students' learning motivation. At the end of the article, the research results and practical application value are obtained. The influence of this paper on the research in this field is briefly described.

**Keywords:** Scaffolding, Early Childhood Education, ESL.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Research topic and justification

The present study is about the practical implication and impact of Scaffolding in Chinese preschool English as a Second Language learning process, to further explore whether the performance of these children has been positively affected after they have accepted the Scaffolding teaching method. Vygotsky believes that there are two levels of students' development: one is the current level of students, which refers to the level that students can solve problems without external help. The other is the level of development that students achieve through education, in which students gain potential in the process of education. Scaffolding is a teaching theory proposed by the constructionist Bruner. During the child's learning process, teachers or other experienced people provide help and support for the child, and this support is provided as the child's ability increases. The purpose of gradually decreasing is to allow children to learn with interaction and help (Bruner, 1976) [2]. In

practical operations and literature, scaffolding theory and recent development area theory are often combined.

Vygotsky also suggests that, within the zone of proximal development, schools should provide students with teaching higher than students' level, and provide students with difficult content. (Vygotsky, 1978, p32) [10]. Scaffolding brings these positive results to classroom learning. It is reflected in three aspects. First, it is reflected in the positive effect of Scaffolding in the process of children learning higher-level phonics. The second is Scaffolding help teachers to organize a better language lesson. Finally, to a certain extent, Scaffolding teaching method motivate children to learn and explore new things.

Scaffolding theory requires teachers to clarify the real level of students in the teaching process and predict the level that students can reach after passing the teaching, so as to find the distance between these two levels. Build a "scaffold" between them. In the process of using the scaffold, teachers should teach students how to learn and develop learning habits. The "scaffold" will eventually be

taken away, And the level of students will accompany them for life. The research of Britta shows that based on students' participation in 31 scaffolding courses, the scaffolding teaching method is very suitable for phonics courses. It help students gain reading ability effectively, learning knowledge and skills, thinking and logic have also been improved (Britta, 2004) [11] . Vygotsky also suggests that, within the zone of proximal development, schools should provide students with teaching higher than students' level, and provide students with difficult content. (Vygotsky, 1978, p32) [10] , These studies can show that the scaffolding teaching method has indeed played a positive role in the teaching process, and is generally accepted by students and teachers. The scaffolding teaching model is allowed to be used in the classroom by leaders. It is worth noting that the positive impact of scaffolding is very significant in the classroom of early childhood education, which emphasizes the importance of the scaffolding model in teaching. Therefore, it is very necessary to study the impact of scaffolding on children's classrooms.

### **1.2. Research ideas**

In this study, by summarizing previous research and conclusions in relevant literature, a preliminary predictive conclusion is reached, that is, scaffolding has a positive impact on children's second language learning. In order to further confirm this problem and explore the relationship between them We have conducted a series of studies on children and teachers. The main research data comes from students' transcripts and feedback from teachers and students' interviews on scaffolding. This is used to evaluate their performance. It could be found that, modern scholars' research on scaffolding is mostly embodied in the process of children learning science, or helping to shape children's thinking framework and construct children's logical models. However, research on the effects of scaffolding on children's second language learning is uncommon, which may hinder those scholars who want to understand or study the relationship between scaffolding and second language learning. This motivates us to conduct a more in-depth discussion on this research. The use of scientific methods to obtain data and rational analysis, combined with the feedback of students and teachers to make more detailed speculations, are also the characteristics and advantages of this article.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW OF SCAFFOLDING IN ESL**

### **2.1. Practical significance of scaffolding theory to teachers**

Under the new education policy and environment in China, teaching strategy is very crucial for teachers. The interaction between learning and teaching has also become a popular topic recently. As a result, many age-

appropriate teaching methods have emerged by learners. Scaffolding is one of these teaching strategy (Rafik-Galea & Nair, 2008) [9]. Scaffolding is developed from Vygotsky's the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky illustrates three theoretical positions on the relation between learning and development. He rejects these three theoretical positions. He points out that there are two developmental levels: one is that the learner has already reached and solve the problems independently, another one is the learner could reach but not reach yet. The distance between these two levels call the "Zone of Proximal Development". That means the students can solve the problems with assistance today, they could solve these by themselves tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1978, p.33) [10] Scaffolding is intentional, strategic support provided by teachers that allows children to complete tasks they would not be able to do on their own (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) [10] [12] . Under the instruction of scaffolds, teachers provide more guidance to help students to answer questions correctly. Students can actively explore themselves according to the scaffolding teaching method set up by teachers in class.

### **2.2. The practical value of scaffolding theory to language learners**

In the ESL contexts, scaffolding research (mostly conducted in kindergarten through grade 12 classrooms) describes how teachers provide scaffolding instruction, using a variety of conversation patterns and strategies, such as questioning, restructuring, repetition, or exposition, to help English language learners (ELLs) build content knowledge together (Kayi-Ayda, 2013, P325) [7]. Some studies examine the impact and use of scaffolding in students phonemic awareness development in preschool and kindergarten. The study found that teachers were able to use scaffolding in their teaching, which supported children's learning and acquisition of phonemic awareness. It also affects the progress of most preschool and kindergarten children at different levels of skill, and even can acquire more complex levels of phonemic awareness. (McGee & Ukrainetz, 2009, P602) [8]. Other studies show the investigation of how scaffolding effects the ESL learners in an academic oral skills (Kayi-Aydar, 2013,P324) [7]. In Chinese ESL preschools, there is not much practical use and research on scaffolding, especially in younger age phonics studies and language development. Numerous studies have shown that the scaffolding approach has a significant impact on children's language development. In the ESL context, scaffolding can provide great help and inspiration for teachers' teaching process. By focusing on the impact and practical use of scaffolding in ESL, this study aims to investigate how scaffolding help teachers to organize a better literacy and phonics lesson, motivate students to explore and to be an autonomous learners in Chinese ESL preschool.

### 3. METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

#### 3.1. Research method

In order to prove that the scaffolding education model can help children learn phonics, a complete research project is carried out in a foreign language kindergarten in Shanghai. This research method combines interview and test analysis. Our ESL preschool in Shanghai randomly selected two 4-year-old Chinese kids. And did quantitative and qualitative analysis on the transcripts of their three exams. Including students' Before and after the experiment, students' speeches and answers to questions were recorded, especially for students The phonics performance changes were analyzed quantitatively, and some scientific and effective data and performance trends were obtained. The teacher's evaluation and suggestions for each test of the students were also used as qualitative analysis materials. At the same time, two foreign teachers were also interviewed. The content of interview is the performance of students' classroom activity and participation. And qualitatively analyze the content of the teacher's interview. In addition, the conversation between the teacher and the student in the classroom can be transcribed into text, which includes the teacher's language, gestures, and micro-expressions And other fine movements. At the same time, the children's language and pronunciation details, such as short and long sounds, are also recorded. These transcriptions are also used as materials for analyzing the details of the teacher's teaching. In this research, qualitative research is combined with quantitative research, so as to make the data obtained more reliable and real. These analytical data will be used as support to prove the research hypothesis.

#### 3.2. Research data collection

##### 3.2.1. Semi-structured interview

The choice of semi-structured interviews reflects the need for researchers to gain insight into the motivations of specific populations. It is appropriate to choose semi-structured interview for this study. The purpose of the study is to find out the impact and use of scaffolding, which can not only be reflected from the achievements of children, but also from the ideas of teachers. I choose the two ESL preschool teachers to know their real thoughts of scaffolding, because semi-structured interview can grasp the emotions and ideas of interviewees.

##### 3.2.2. Case study

A case study is a survey design found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which researchers conduct in-depth analysis of a case (Creswell, 2014) [5] and also limited by time and activity. This research aims to track the changes of children for one year through the report

card to see the importance of scaffolding. The study uses the test report of two 4-year-old kids who first was taught by teachers using scaffolding as teaching strategy in phonics in a Chinese ESL preschool.

##### 3.2.3. Analysis of teaching effect

Transcript analysis provides a relatively new observation technique for understanding educational discourse in online text environment. Theoretical frameworks and coding schemes/protocols for transcript analysis need to be rigorously evaluated (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, Koole & Kappelman, 2006, P2) [6]. The original research questions came from the a video taken in a Chinese ESL preschool. We choose the clip of the class video and made the transcript, which can help us to see more details that we ignored at once. Transcript analysis should be one of several methods and sources of data to provide comprehensive interpretation and aggregation (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, Koole & Kappelman, 2006, P2) [6].

These three methods are selected in order to obtain more effective and credible data and make the research results more valuable and reliable. Through the combination of three methods, we can try to find out the impact and use of scaffolding in Chinese ESL preschool.

#### 3.3. Ethics

The importance of ethical concerns in research is demonstrated by the standardization of research practice by institutions and professional bodies and the growth of more ethically aware literature (Cohen et al., 2007) [3]. Our research is based on respect for the dignity and rights of the participants and requires the necessary information from their full and voluntary consent (Allmark, 2002, P13) [1]. The ethical issue that will come up in my research is the kids' test reports. Therefore, not only the consent of the parents is required, but also whether the child wants to participate in the study. I need permission from the children.

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.1. Scaffolding higher-level phonics

Based on video transcripts, the teacher just provides support when needed during scaffolding process. In the lesson of higher level phonics, students have already accumulated relevant knowledge and skills. Some students can voice the first phoneme and segment phonemes on their own. In other words, phonemes are not always started or segmented by the teacher. Evidence is provided by transcripts:

Teacher: Okay guys. What is this called? I forget, who can tell me what is this? (looking around)

...

Student: ha^p

Teacher: ha^p or k k k , yes

Student: cap

Teacher: yes c ^ap c^ap

(0'42"-1'23") (44s)

Teacher: Amazin:::g.Teacher: W^hat color is this? (pickup the paint jar)

Student: [G^reen:].

Teacher: [G^reen, super-duper cool.](4.0)(put down the paint jar)

When letting students voice "hap" and "green", the teacher lets students perform independently, without giving help in advance. Scaffolding practices belong to none supports, because only teacher feedback appears after students say the word. When learning "cap", the teacher emphasises beginning phoneme "k" first and guides a student to speak the whole word. This can be categorised into minimal support, because the teacher really reminds the first sound in the word and pauses there. From the angle of social constructivist, scaffolding gives support for learners' immediate construction of knowledge and lays foundation for their future independent learning. Scaffolding is undertaken by the teacher and removed whenever the student can work on his own.

Furthermore, qualitative analysis of transcript demonstrates that scaffolding is mainly conducted through questioning and repetition. To be specific, phoneme awareness or ability is diagnosed by questioning about how to speak "hap" and "green". Questioning triggers conversation and creates an interactive atmosphere of learning and teaching. Furthermore, teacher intervention is also shown by repeating what learner says (e.g. ha^p, G^reen). Repetition sends a signal of confirming and recognising student response. This is partly consistent with Kayi-Ayda (2013, P325) [7] arguing that in the context of ESL, scaffolding instruction depends on various conversation patterns and strategies, including questioning, repetition, restructuring, or exposition, thus helping English language learners (ELLs) construct knowledge.

Revealed by quantitative data in Table 1, scaffolding in the case study has produced positive outcomes for two students named Dorothy and William. Demonstrated by the scoring for phonic sounds, Dorothy keeps relatively steady level of knowledge acquisition during the three terms, while William has achieved remarkable growth. This is because the teacher deeply understands when and how much information/support should be provided, depending on phonics awareness of each student. Above discussion echoes with previous findings of McGee & Ukrainetz (2009, P602) [8] that scaffolding helps foster phonemic awareness of children at different levels, and

even push them to explore more complicated phonics. It is the flexible tactics of scaffolding that stirs and maintains confidence of learners. Otherwise some students may quit phonics learning because teacher support is unavailable or too excessive.

**Table 1.** Scoring for phonic sounds

Name	Term1	Term2	Term3
Dorothy	9/9	17/19	10/10
William	0/10	2/19	9/10

## 4.2. Scaffolding help teachers to organize a better lesson

### 4.2.1. A powerful auxiliary method of communication between teachers and students

In the interview data, both teachers are professional and experienced teacher. They have been preschool teacher over 5 years and have been worked in China for almost 4 years. In the Chinese specific context, teachers will face the different challenges during lesson time, for example:

*Teacher A: "Some of the problems I have faced are: lack of resources whether it be materials or teacher assistants. Sometimes students do not understand the instructions for an activity because it is being explained to them in English. There is not about time to complete the lesson."*

How to overcome these challenges? They said scaffolding is useful to them and they enjoy and benefit from this teaching strategy.

*Teacher A: "I think scaffolding can definitely help with that if teachers are given enough time to prepare and carry out the lessons."*

*Teacher B: "Scaffolding has been useful for me in my classroom. It has allowed children to pick up key phrases and important classroom commands quickly."*

Scaffolding is not the only way to teach young learners academy but also daily life communication, if the kids do not have the language problem, the interaction between teachers and children will become more actively and smoothly. Scaffolding is generally regarded as an effective teaching method (Cole, 2006) [4] .

### 4.2.2. Effective means of character and phonetic learning

Literacy learning is quite difficult and important for kids learning second language. Phonics is very popular in China. For teacher who worked in Chinese ESL

preschool, having ability to organize a better lesson is the most significant thing. Teacher A uses many ways to demonstrate phonics lesson, for example:

*“When introducing new sound, I like to use various tools so students have different ways of obtaining the knowledge. For example when introducing the /a/ sound, I will use a song. Then I will use pictures of words starting with the /a/ sound. Tracing sheets with simple words with the /a/ sound. learning to differentiate the /a/ sound with other sounds through a game. I have had scaffolding training, as the benefits of this teaching technique are being widely spread. I think it is very important for young learners.”*

Teacher B also willing to use scaffolding in his phonics lesson, like “modeling”. Teachers can overcome these challenges by employing a variety of techniques to help students provide support for their peers and benefit from scaffolding talk (Kayi-Aydar, 2013,P334) [7] .

### **4.3. Scaffolding motivate children to learn**

Before, the curricula in Chinese ESL preschool did not provide the appropriate techniques and strategies for teachers to teach kindergarten children English. Children may fail to learn and lose their motivation of learning. In some Chinese ESL preschool, they teach kids phonics to improve their phonemic awareness. Phonics lesson is a great example to show what is scaffolding and the great impact of it. The teacher will teach the kids the sounds of letters and let them to put it together. The kids may find it is easier than recognize the words directly. They think that is like a puzzle game, when you put all the things that you know you could have a new word. Kids love play, this activity can motivate them to learn and love to explore these letters by themselves.

05 TEA: Could you please raise your hand? I don't understand

06 everybody shouting at the same time (puzzled face)

07 TEA: Yes [ (pointing at student 3)]

08 ST3: ha^p

09 TEA: ha^p or k k k , yes((pointing at student 4))

10 ST4: cap

11 TEA: yes c ^ap c^ap

12 TEA: C^ap C^ap ((clapping)).

13 STU: C ^ap C^ap. C ^ap C^ap.((clapping))

14 ST3: C :^AP C:^AP.

15 TEA: c : ^ap c : ^ap(0.2)

The transcript shows that scaffolding can allow students to make connections and come to conclusions on

their own. It also reiterates key concepts of material being learned.

Also, during the interview, the interviewee described the scene when they use scaffolding in their lesson. During the teacher-student interactions, teachers acted as facilitator and mediator, and almost everyone has the opportunity to participate in it.

*Teacher A : “It helps breaks information down for students and they are able to build up the learning. It allows the teacher to ensure that students are taking part in their own learning and are motivated to learn.”*

Bruner believes that students' learning motivation is often confused under ordinary teaching conditions. Some students seek good grades for some external motivation, such as to get rewards or avoid punishments from teachers and parents, or to compete with classmates. “As Maimonides would say, their learning is not their own.” (Bruner, 1961, p.26) [2] . Many children find learning is monotonous; they are learning to complete the task rather than learning about something new to them. Autonomous learning is lacking, and educators should work hard to motivate students with intrinsic and extrinsic motives. For example, in ESL preschool children need to learn the second language, how can they learn well? How can they have motivations to learn language? Phonics is an important embodiment of scaffolding teaching method. Like the teacher A said, during the class time, we will let the kids learn the different letters sounds at first, then combine them together, dividing the big thing into a small thing, learn the things step by step, which can make difficult things become easier and stimulate children intrinsic motivation. Teachers should try to find their interest and motivate them to learn things independently. Like the kids love dinosaurs, we can let the kids to explore this topic by themselves. It's the intrinsic motivation that drives them to study and explore objects.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

### **5.1. Findings**

The main goal of the current study was to determine the role of Scaffolding teaching method in Chinese preschool English as a Second Language learning process. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis of the research data, we drew a series of conclusions and verified the initial hypothesis. This study has identified the performance of these children has been positively affected after they have accepted the Scaffolding teaching method. Scaffolding can help children learn higher level phonics and have a positive impact on students learning a second language. The second major finding was that Scaffolding help teacher to organize a better lesson and motivate children to learn. The insights gained from this study may be of assistance to help scholars who want to understand scaffolding implication

explore this field of knowledge, and give them some inspiration to help them improve In-depth research. This study has found that generally improved the implication purpose of Scaffolding teaching method. In the future educational practice, scaffolding teaching method will have good operability. Especially in the process of children learning a second language, scaffolding will help teachers and children better enrich classroom content and improve students' learning enthusiasm. The significance of this study is also to help foreign language teachers realize the significant role scaffolding plays in teaching. And the scaffolding teaching method is applied in the practice classroom.

### **5.2. Limitation and Recommendation**

A limitation of this study is that the scope of collecting sample data is too small, and the population being studied is not large enough. Even if we did the research Quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis, and to ensure the ecological validity of the experiment as much as possible, the experimental results may still be biased due to too few research samples. In the future research, more research samples should be analyzed, and the time range of the research should be expanded, This means continuous tracking of changes in student performance. In addition to expanding the research sample size, we should also study the performance results more carefully. For example, the improvement of students' performance in phonics, and further analyze the reasons for this situation. In the process of obtaining experimental data, ensure the ecological effectiveness of the data and make the results derived from the data convinced.

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