The Use of Scaffolding Strategy in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: The English language is a necessity not only for education but also for current culture's admittance to wealth and social prosperity. The English language helps people improve and enhance their social and economic standing, as well as form a dynamic culture and a strong state. It serves a social purpose and makes a vital contribution to societies. The importance of English language is well understood by all the people and English language plays many important roles in Sri Lanka. The purpose of this study, which was done within a sociocultural framework, was to see how scaffolding affected EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' learning the target language. The research design was mixed method approach: structured interview, observation and questionnaire. The findings of the study show that most teachers in EFL classes are unaware of the scaffolding tactics to test rather than scaffold their students' knowledge. They are required to know how to be motivated, and how important they are developing English language learning students' skills in mainstream classrooms. The study's findings demonstrated that in the context of teaching English in Sri Lanka, using scaffolding techniques and implementing personalized instructions enhances teaching quality, comprehend learners' awareness, and interactivity.
Keywords: English language teaching, Scaffolding Strategies, English language teachers

Introduction

In Sri Lanka, the two main languages are Sinhala and Tamil. English has been in use since the 1800s when the country was colonized by the British, and the role of English in different aspects of the country, such as civil administration is considerable. The Colebrook and Cameron Commission advocated that English be made the official language and it became the primary medium of instruction in secondary schools and universities (Broughton 2002).

During the colonial period, the English language was considered a source of class differences, yet individuals saw its potential in their daily lives (Karunaratne 2008). In 1991, the National Education Commission conducted a field evaluation in order to formulate a national education policy, and one of the priority areas selected was improving English language instruction (ELT) in schools. As a result, the 1997 educational reforms recommended being implemented in order to introduce ELT in Sri Lankans primary and secondary schools. In 2003, more ELT-related educational reforms were implemented, including the establishment of the ABOE program from Grades 3 to 5 and the bilingual program from Grades 10 to 13 (Little 2007).
province.

English language plays a vital role in Sri Lanka as an official language, a medium of instruction in education, and a vital tool for business, tourism, and global communication. It bridges linguistic diversity (lingua fraca), offers economic opportunities, and connects Sri Lanka to the international community. English as a Global language and it plays an increasingly interconnected world, the demand for English as a Second Language (ESL) proficiency has surged, making ESL classrooms essential sites for linguistic and cultural acquisition.

Effective ESL instruction necessitates a pedagogical approach that not only recognizes the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners but also addresses their varying levels of language proficiency. Scaffolding techniques have emerged as a crucial framework in the realm of ESL education, facilitating the gradual acquisition of language skills while nurturing learners' confidence and autonomy.

Scaffolding, a concept initially introduced by Vygotsky and further refined by Wood, Bruner, and others, is rooted in the idea that learning is a dynamic, interactive process. In the ESL context, scaffolding refers to the systematic and tailored support provided by educators to learners, enabling them to bridge the gap between their current language abilities and desired proficiency levels. This approach acknowledges that ESL learners enter classrooms with distinct linguistic backgrounds and varying degrees of familiarity with the English language.

There is a general view in Sri Lankan education that one of the causes for English language learners' failure is a lack of efficacy in teaching the language (Canagarajah 2008). Many studies discussed a variety of classroom difficulties that impact ELT in Sri Lanka. In the General Certificate of Education (Advanced level) classes English is taught as an extra subject. Hettiarachchi (2010) says that majority of students consider that studying English is not a priority.

This research paper aims to delve into the multifaceted landscape of scaffolding techniques in Sri Lankan ESL classrooms, exploring their theoretical underpinnings, practical applications, and their impact on language acquisition. By examining the diverse methods through which educators scaffold ESL learners, we seek to shed light on the pivotal role of scaffolding in creating inclusive and effective learning environments, ultimately equipping learners with the linguistic competence necessary for success in today's globalized world. This research also examine teaching experiences to inform the research problem such as a lack of student motivation, and a lack of exposure to practice the target language in the classes in the schools in Sri Lanka's Eastern province.

The concept of Scaffolding as a teaching approach

The using of the concept called scaffolding as a teaching strategy has its origins in the educationist philosopher Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, according to the National Research Council (2000). The scaffolding strategy provides supports (termed as scaffolds) to help English language learners. The strategy advocates exercises bit more difficult than the learner can do on their own. The transitory nature of the scaffolds is an important aspect of the scaffolding approach. As the trainees' abilities grow, the more knowledgeable individual's scaffolding eventually vanishes. Finally, the learner can finish the work or grasp the concepts independently (Hammond 2001). Scaffolds are activities and tasks that: motivate students' interest in the task to help the English learning students focus on achieving the goal (Chang 2002). According to Koh (2009), scaffolding increases efficiency and produces momentum by allowing English learning students to spend less time looking and more time learning. Scaffolding was classified into four forms. The first form is Procedural scaffolding assists students in effectively using relevant tools and resources. It also benefits English learning students to understand how to navigate the course and participate in learning activities. The third form is can use Strategic Scaffolding to identify alternate tactics and ways for solving challenging problems. The fourth form is metacognitive scaffolding aids students in the development of their thinking and the management of their learning (Rosenshine 1992).

Students learn at different rates, according to their preferences, and in various ways. As a result of tailored education, teachers can modify their classes to a variety of learning styles and demands, offering the best chance for success. Adjustments to training and preparation can make a tremendous difference over time, even if a personalised approach to instruction takes time (McTighe and Brown 2005). Customization, according to Tseng (2001), is the use of technology and systems to produce goods and services that are tailored to individual consumers' needs with near-mass production efficiency. This is not the same as individualized learning in terms of schooling.

Aims of the Study

This study aims to:

1. To identify how the English teachers in government schools use scaffolding tactics to   help their students improve their reading, writing, and listening skills in Sri Lanka.

2. To identify the scaffolding tactics to improve reading, writing, and listening skills, as well as to assess these abilities in Sri Lanka.

3. To identify the way the English teachers who utilize such scaffolding tactics on purpose.

Based on the above aims the following research were generated:

1) To what extent do English teachers in government schools use scaffolding tactics to help their students improve their reading, writing, and listening skills in Sri Lanka?

2) What are the scaffolding tactics used by English teachers to improve reading, writing, and listening skills, as well as to assess these abilities in Sri Lanka?

3) How do English teachers utilize such scaffolding tactics on purpose?

The use by Sri Lankan English language classes the open-ended questions could be cited as an effective usage of scaffolding strategies. Question 1 was given in a form of statistical analysis in the questionnaire to be answered by the primary and secondary teachers. Question 2 was given in the form of observing descriptive statistics of instructors' reports of the classroom performance, researcher observation, and structured interviews. Question 3 apprehend the problems of English scaffolding tricks in empowering strategies on it, which is considered more in the final debate.

Hypotheses of the Study

Ho: Teachers of English use scaffolding techniques to teach all four skills

H1: Teachers of English do not use scaffolding techniques to teach all four skills

Ho: Use of scaffolding techniques improve all four skills.

H2: Use of scaffolding techniques do not improve all four skills

Method and Result

This is a qualitative study on classroom methods used by teachers in some selected government schools in Eastern Province. The uses of scaffolding strategies by the non-native ELT teachers in those schools were examined using methods such as observation, structured interviews, and teachers' self-reports, to enhance reading skills. The sample includes 24 non-native English language teachers as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1 shows the study sample's profile of English Language Teaching Teachers in Eastern Province, Sri Lanka.

Non-Native English Language Teachers		No	Percentage %
Gender	Male	10	42
	Female	14	58
Qualification	B.A	15	62.5
	Masters	09	37.5
Years of Experience	1 -10	20	83
	10 -20	4	17

The study used three main instruments due to the mixed method approach: questionnaire, structured interviews, and observation sheet with the English government schools' teachers in Eastern province, Sri Lanka. The last three tools were chosen with significant dependability based on the chart (Kucan 1996). The purpose of the interviews is to see if teachers are aware of such methods.

A self-report questionnaire was created, with Tamil and Sinhala as the sample first languages. The teachers were asked to respond on a five-point scale to 28 statements on the questionnaire. The items on the questionnaire are divided into five categories of learning strategies, which can be described as follows:

1) Cooperative learning tactics: This scale measures the use of cooperative learning strategies to improve reading, writing, and listening comprehension. It has five positively written phrases that would indicate that such tactics should be used for each class.

2) Monitoring comprehension tactics: monitoring strategies to help English learning students understand what they're learning. It has seven affirmative assertions that demonstrate the use of such tactics in the reading.

3) Multiple teaching tactics: This scale relates to the use of several teaching strategies to improve reading skills.

4) Compression questions: to improve reading, writing, and listening comprehension skills are referred to as answering comprehension questions.

5) Metacognitive methods: This scale measures can use metacognitive tactics to improve your reading comprehension.

Graph 1
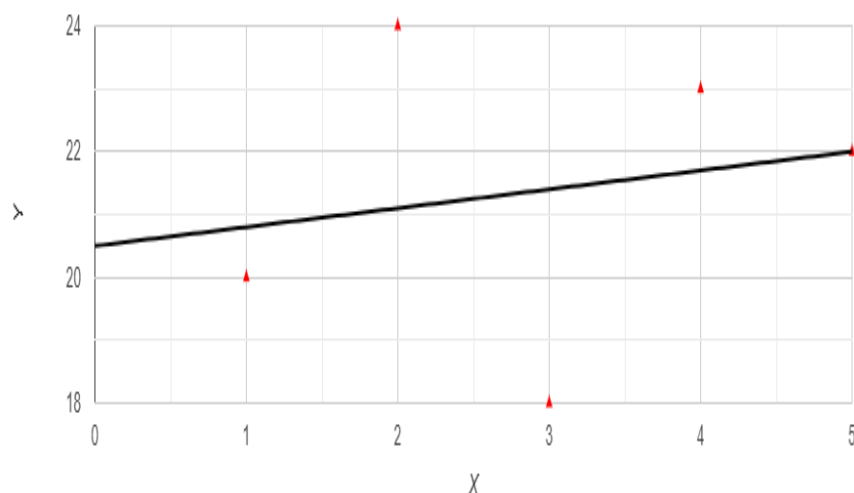
Graph 1 illustrates the responses of 24 teachers to the five statements that followed the 28 questions. The questions have been designed to elicit responses to questions find to what extent do English teachers in government schools use scaffolding strategies, whether there is any statistically significant difference in mean scores of English teachers who utilize scaffolding techniques on the basis of their gender, working experience, or teaching qualifications.

Discussion

The researcher's task of comparing the results is made difficult by the shortage of previous studies on Lankan ELT teachers' use of scaffolding strategies. Almost all of the research looked at the impact of scaffolding strategies on building abilities in social environments (Yelland 2007). Overall, studies showed that teachers continue to use scaffolding tactics to improve reading, writing, and listening abilities in school environments. Phelps (2004) says that teachers' professional development would be hampered by their unawareness of new approaches. Policymakers in the Ministry of Education should focus not just on selecting talented teachers, but also on continuing professional development in the classroom in Sri Lanka.

Due to the similarity of the survey participants and the lack of statistically significant variations between working experience and education level. The study's findings support this concept, revealing that English language teachers on three primary scales: cooperative tactics, comprehension tactics, and metacognitive skills.

The implication of Teaching English

Scaffolding is an effective strategy that could be utilised in ELT classroom. De Guerrero (2000) describes that strategy provides English learning students with the pedagogical push which would take them to the next higher level. Walqui (2006) is of the opinion that when teachers are given targets, the learners perform better in terms of the volume of work and identifies creating metacognition modelling, schema building, and re-presenting material as important scaffolding strategies. Teachers can model suitable language patterns and terminology that English language learning students may need to employ when they perform tasks and activities. Walqui (2006) says that teachers can use a variety of verbal and nonverbal aids, to contextualize the language acquisition process. They could utilize bridging approaches to help students develop abilities making use of existing knowledge, modelling tactics - such as self-assessment exercises, think, and metacognition development. Using scaffolding approaches, it is possible to give English language learning students work at a higher level of proficiency. However, using scaffolding approaches in language learning situations can be difficult because providing students with the exact aid they require involves a lot of ability on the part of the teachers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the application of scaffolding techniques in ESL classrooms is undoubtedly a powerful pedagogical approach to address the diverse needs of English language learners. Ross (1976) describes scaffolding as a metaphor for the interaction between an expert and a novice. This interaction involves a problem-solving task which is beyond the capacity of an English language learner. Ferreira (2007) calls for allowing the students to operate within the limits of their competency. Positive attitudes towards English language can help students grow their skills and confidence, making it easier for them to learn principles professionally. Furthermore, favourable attitudes can raise students' knowledge of its relevance in everyday life, its role in contributing to the country's progress socially and economically.

However, this research has underscored the multifaceted challenges educators encounter when implementing scaffolding strategies. These challenges encompass variations in learner backgrounds, time constraints, the need for ongoing professional development, and the evolving nature of language acquisition theories. Despite these hurdles, the benefits of scaffolding techniques in enhancing language acquisition and fostering learner autonomy cannot be understated. The study has demonstrated that in the context of teaching English in Sri Lanka, using scaffolding and implementing personalized instructions enhances teaching quality, comprehends learners' awareness in the future. As we move forward, it is imperative for educators, institutions, and policymakers to acknowledge these challenges and work collaboratively to create a supportive environment that empowers ESL instructors to effectively implement scaffolding strategies, thus ensuring the successful language development of English learners in diverse educational setting

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