

# Scaffolding Approach in Teaching Writing in English as a Second Language (ESL) Context

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This paper aims to identify the perceptions of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and students' knowledge of the scaffolding approach in learning to teach writing in a ESL context. A total of 37 students who are doing their Bachelor's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language in a university in Malaysia participated in the research. Data were collected using a survey and were analysed using frequencies and percentages. The data revealed that most of the respondents have an excellent perception of the scaffolding approach, and generally, almost all agreed that it has positive impacts on teaching writing. It has shown that the scaffolding approach is an effective way to enhance students' potential in learning, specifically in learning to teach writing.

**Keywords:** *Scaffolding; teaching writing, writing skills, ESL context.*

## Introduction

It has been essential to teach the English language as it is used in classroom activities to communicate with other people. When it comes to teaching approach, there are multiple ways of conducting by the educators for the learners to absorb the objectives of the subject matters. The teaching process is one of the essential skills that need to be developed to make the learning process to be done in a more engaged and understandable way. The approach is defined as the way of learning or the strategies used to create a person that enables them to acquire what they are learning. So, there are a variety of teaching approaches in language learning which was implemented based on a diverse learner where they could buy on the particular criteria.



Based on Stigler and Hiebert (2009), they have mentioned that not only the challenges in content do not lead to achievement but how the material has been taught, enormously or superficially. The approach in the literary context of learning, involves the restrained shifting of authority or responsibility of the corroboration of learning from the educators to the learners. The importance of teaching approaches in various context needs to be analysed and suitable so that it can be used and implemented in classroom management so that the teaching process can correlate with the learning process, which is reachable (Majid & Stapa, 2017).

Writing acts as a medium for a person to express their ideas emotionally or academically in a written form. It is transferred to another person to read. Still, the writing skill needs to ease a person to understand the content of the writing. Based on Moghaddam and Malekzadeh (2011), they mentioned that the book is a thinking process and also stated that paper could be organised and given with a large number in the revised form before the release of the original. The act of writing is a cognitive process that comprehends artistic and creative ideas and mechanical skills (Almobarraz, 2017; Yang, 2016; Dorn & Soffos, 2001).

According to Alghamdi (2019), English as Second Language or well known as ESL, is a term used to describe the program conducted by educators to teach and educate English for the non- native speakers and also describing the ESL student him/herself. Malaysian students are considered ESL students as they are not a native speakers of English in which their first language is other languages or their mother tongue language. This situation made the Malaysian students learn English that involved all the four skills, which were speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

The first language made them learn under this kind of program is the environment and the surroundings in which they have been raised, and also the communication language used to them as their first language. So, when they started to enter the education field where the English language became one of the essential words to learn to speak and write, most of them faced a lot of difficulties, and it became a problematic issue for the students to cope with. The ESL program was introduced to help the students to acquire knowledge of the English language to the maximum by expert educators in the English language. The range of critical ESL pedagogy or method of teaching is entirely challenging and provocative (Rashtchi, 2019).

It has been determined that it is no easy task to teach the English language for the ESL classroom, as it involves the learners from different background knowledge and diverse culture where their first language is different. The best age for a person to acquire a language is before the critical period. The critical period hypothesis state that when a person was not exposed to any words before puberty, they will face difficulties in language acquisition, which is their first language, but English became the second language to acquire. Learners

definitely will be struggling to buy them. The educators of ESL need to find a solution or a way to come up with teaching approaches that will help the ESL learner to acquire the English language much more comfortably.

When it comes to teaching approaches, there are various type of methods that have been introduced to make the ESL students learn the language more engagingly as it will boost the language acquisition. These methods allow learners to meditate, reflect, and pool resources in the

process of knowledge building (Jill, 2009). Language teaching in the 20th century has been signalled by a constant change and revolution by the growth of competing language teaching ideologies (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). There is a lot of teaching that has been introduced, such as Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-lingual, Scaffolding, and so on. These teaching methods have been used frequently in language teaching and gave positive impacts to the learners to acquire the language faster and with more meaning. One of the most significant and impactful teaching approaches that have provided an excellent result for the learners in both beginners and the intermediate level, was the scaffolding method. Scaffolding is defined as a process in which educators display or illustrate how to carry out the problem-solving skill in a subject matter and later on withdraw from the teaching and this will assist and offer support when needed. In other words, the scaffolding method is a scheme in breaking down a learning process to a few steps before getting the whole sum from the learners. Olson and Pratt (2000) stated that the activities provided in scaffolding instruction are beyond the level of what learners can do independently. Bruner (1966), a famous psychologist and instructional designer stated in his theory that when a student is given reinforcement needed for a particular content while they are learning new things or knowledge. They have a high chance to use the experience with their effort without relying on other people's help.

Scaffolding is defined in two contexts. It can be performed by human teachers, tutors or peers, and even computers. The scaffolding method is generally a short-term or a temporary framework that provides a support system for the students until they solve or understand the particular content by themselves (Iyer, 2019). Besides, this method can be used to teach writing skill in the English language as scaffolding acts as assisting in the form of support and also could help the students be able to brainstorm ideas in writing an essays when they have no ideas. Then constructing a dissertation is impossible. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) further explained by stating that the more a peer or teacher provides the scaffolds, the more the learners can accomplish the tasks that they can perform.

Teaching writing in an ESL context is the most challenging part for an educator faced as writing is considered as one of the complicated skills that need to be taught for the learners for both beginners and also at intermediate level. Writing talent in the ESL context is a



convoluted process as it involves a lot of active skills such as generating ideas, multifarious drafting, response practices, revision, and closing of editing. Writing skills also enhance the language acquisition as the student demonstrates with words, sentences, a more massive lump of writing to communicate with their concept productively, and also to fortify the grammar and the vocabulary they are learning in the classroom (Putri, 2013; Hashim, 2018). There are a lot of approaches or methods introduced by experts: scaffolding, interactive, constructivist, mentoring, and problem-based learning, and so on.

These approaches are applicable in teaching writing, but the matter that needs to take account is the suitability of the plan for the learners' level and also the impacts on the learners of the particular criteria. This paper mainly aims to identify the perceptions of Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) students' knowledge of the scaffolding approaches in learning teaching writing and the impacts of using scaffolding approaches in learning to teach writing in the ESL context.

## **Literature Review**

### **Teaching Writing**

Writing has always been seen as an essential skill in English language acquisition. Books have been identified as a critical skill that students need to develop and fully master to succeed academically and professionally in the 21st-century league (Colwell, 2018). This importance is because it reinforces grammatical structures and vocabulary that educators strive to teach their students. It is the area in which learners need to be offered adequate time to develop their writing skills. Therefore more time should be devoted to it in classrooms so that they will be prepared to communicate in real life as well as academic situations (Syarifah & Gunawan, 2016; Ismail, 2011) effectively.

### **Scaffolding in ESL Context**

Learning is a socially situated activity and what a learner at first accomplishes only in a social setting; she or he will eventually be able to do independently (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005; Nurkholidah & Margana, 2017). In education, scaffolding refers to a variety of instructional techniques used to move students progressively toward a better understanding and greater independence in the learning process. Scaffolding could guide students and make sure they can be navigated properly. Over the past few decades, scaffolding has been a promising and a beneficial technique used in teaching and learning, and it is indeed that the metaphor of scaffolding has been used as the name of a theoretical construct in education in general and particularly in language teaching (Gonulal & Loewen, 2018; DeCapua, 2018). The realisations of designed-in scaffolding can be found in how classroom goals are identified,

how classrooms are organised, and in the selection and sequencing of tasks. To investigate how scaffolding

contributes to the ESL context, the use of semiotic systems was chosen to be discussed here. Another reason why gatekeepers should implement scaffolding to support writing and learning, in general, is that scaffolding will be able to assist the achievement of a successful level of social interaction within a community (Oliver & Herrington 2003). Sheldon (2011) stated that a useful scaffold should not limit the students' learning process but should be able to enhance their performance. Scaffolding can also help in understanding the idea of the context (Kayi-Aydar, 2013).

## **Methods**

This part mainly deals with the methods used in this study, which consists of four sections, namely the research design, participants, data collections, and data analysis.

### **Research Design**

The design of this research is a mixed method. It consists of qualitative and quantitative research questions. By using an online platform, a questionnaire was distributed among the participants. The online platform used to create and distribute the survey was Google form. The research instrument consists of three sections with 12 quantitative items and one qualitative item.

### **Participants**

This study was carried out in one of the public universities in Malaysia in May 2019. Quantitative and qualitative questions are exploring the students' perceptions of the scaffolding approaches in learning teaching writing and how it will impact their learning, especially in teaching writing. For this purpose, 37 Year 3 students from the Faculty of Education in the

university who are currently doing their Bachelor's degree in Teaching English as Second Language (TESL), were selected to participate in this research. These students were chosen because previously, they were familiar and exposed to scaffolding approaches in teaching. Participants were required to answer a set of questionnaires consisting of the research questions based on their basic knowledge and perception of scaffolding approaches.

## Data Collection

For the data collection procedure, the researchers created a questionnaire using Google form with three sections, whereby there were 12 quantitative items and one qualitative item. The first section, section A, solicited demographic information of the participants; meanwhile, section B was about their perception of the scaffolding approaches in learning/teaching writing. Section C required participants to respond to the impact of scaffolding approaches in learning to teach writing in the ESL context. The demographic information collected were age, gender, ethnicity, and education level. In section B, four items emphasise the identification of the students' perception of the scaffolding approaches in learning/teaching writing. Meanwhile, section C that solicited the participants' opinion on the impact of scaffolding approaches in learning to teach writing in the ESL context, both used a 5-level Likert Scale of 'Strongly disagree,' 'Disagree,' 'Not sure,' 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree.' An open-ended question in section C required students to state their view on the efficiency of using scaffolding approaches in teaching writing.

## Data Analysis

For the analysis of the demographic data, frequency and percentage were used. The quantitative research items were analysed into the rate, mean scores, and rate. Thus, they were tabulated; meanwhile, as for the qualitative question, students' opinions on the efficiency of using scaffolding approaches in teaching writing were used to support and give meaning to the quantitative data analysis. Their responses were categorised into three emerging domains and were analysed accordingly.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 will be discussing students' perception of the scaffolding approaches. It was found that most of the respondents, 20 (55.6%), answered strongly agree on a statement, which is 'A teacher may orally describe a concept to students. 22 (61.1%) respondents strongly agree on 'A teacher may use a slideshow with visual aids to further explain the idea.' Furthermore, 20, which is equivalent to 55.6% of respondents and 44.4%, equal to 16 respondents strongly agree and agree respectively to the statement that the teacher may provide the students with a task that asks them to articulate the concept in their words. 48.8% equivalent to 17 respondents and 45.7% equal to 16 respondents strongly agree and agree respectively to the statement that a teacher may ask several students to illustrate the concept on the blackboard.

**Table 1. Percentage of the perception of the scaffolding approaches**

Items	Distribution on Responses <sup>1</sup> (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. A teacher may orally describe a concept to students.	0 (0%)	1 (2.8%)	5 (13.9%)	20 (55.6%)	10 (27.8)
2. A teacher may use a slideshow with visual aids to further explain the idea.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.8%)	13 (36.1%)	22 (61.1%)
3. A teacher may provide the students with a task that asks them articulate the concept in their own words.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	16 (44.4%)	20 (55.6%)
4. A teacher may ask several students to illustrate the concept on the blackboard.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (5.7%)	16 (45.7%)	17 (48.6%)

Based on the findings, this course has supported students in developing understanding of concepts on scaffolding in the classroom through providing different approaches such as the uses of the Whatsapp application to scaffold students in a secondary school in developing their ideas for their writing task. Jenny and Pauline (2005) stated that these sources included the use of different modes of language to build up a particular concept as well as the use of additional semiotic systems, for example, videos, films, or even individual maps. The reason is that the most challenging aspect of academic writing is that students feel they have nothing to write because their minds are blank, and there is no inspiration (Yunus, Salehi, & Chenzi, 2012). In conclusion, TESL students have a decent understanding of the concept of scaffolding based on their perception of it.

**Table 2 Percentage of the impacts of scaffolding approaches in learning to teach writing in the ESL context**

Items	Distribution on Responses ] (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Scaffolding helps me to understand concepts better before constructing essays	0 (0%)	1 (2.8)	4 (11.1%)	18 (50%)	13 (36.1%)
2. Scaffolding helps constructing meanings	0 (0%)	1 (2.8%)	2 (5.6%)	17 (47.2%)	16 (44.4%)
3. Scaffolding helps accomplish my writing time independantly	0 (0%)	1 (2.8%)	2 (5.6%)	18 (50%)	15 (41.7%)
4. Scaffolding helps me in developing a deep sense of culture knowledge	0 (0%)	1 (2.8%)	4 (11.1%)	18 (50%)	13 (36.1%)

Table 2 shows the students' responses toward the impacts of scaffolding approaches in learning to teach writing in the ESL context. It was found that half of the participants (50%) agree that scaffolding helps them to understand the concept better before constructing essays. A high percentage of respondents 47.2% out of 37 respondents agree that scaffolding helps them in building meaning, meanwhile 18 respondents (50%) and another 15 respondents equivalent to 41.7% accept and strongly agree that scaffolding helps them to accomplish their writing independently from time to time. Most of them (50%) also agree that scaffolding helps them in developing a deep sense of cultural knowledge.

From the students' responses toward the questions, it can be concluded that scaffolding approaches have to impact their process of learning to teach writing positively. Scaffolding provides the necessary fundamental knowledge and understanding of a concept that helps to ease students in their learning process, specifically in teaching writing. Scaffolding is an approach that is effective in helping students by giving them guidance and support until they can grasp and understand the concept fully. As stated by Irina (2008), scaffolding acts as a tool that can be used and applied using various techniques by educators to guide students, which enables them to become independent learners. Generally, most of the students agree to the teacher to monitor their work. At the same time, they were writing, as it resulted in a more engaging approach during their writing process, whereby they can do discussions and get immediate feedback from their teacher (Ali & Yunus, 2004).

### **Open-ended question on the efficiency of Scaffolding Approaches.**

**Question: Do you think the Scaffolding method is efficient in teaching writing? Please justify your answer.**

Based on the data received from the TESL 3rd year students of 28 respondents regarding the efficiency of using the Scaffolding approach in teaching writing, there are various opinions have been shared individually for different reasons. Most of the respondents have answered where it is efficient to apply the Scaffolding method in teaching writing in an ESL context, and there is independent justification for each of them as they have experienced in learning to teach writing through this method. First, the person thinks that this method helps the student to grasp the concepts which are related to writing better. Next, there also a statement that scaffolding acts guidelines that are needed to exist to give a hint on building points' thinking and the ideas from the students.

Also, they mentioned that before starting writing, the scaffolding of the ideas' process needs to be done first, that will develop the ideas that will be applied in writing later on. Moreover, they also specified that this teaching method encouraged students to produce an active learning process towards absorbing the writing skill, motivate them to be more confident with their ideas, and minimise students' frustration. Moreover, this approach also allows them to think critically and brainstorm more ideas that can be included in their writing. They also disclose that scaffolding acts as the basic or the beginning before printing because, without proper input on paper, they might not be able to write or produce good writing. With this method, they can construct from scratch.

Apart from that, they also expressed that this method is so useful and efficient as it acts as a supporter of how extant support is given to the students to generate ideas based on their capabilities and potential based on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). So, it will help the students to spend less time sitting with confusion on how to start, and more time will be used for motivation for their effort in writing.

Furthermore, some of the respondents stated that this method is efficient because some learners have different views or understanding regarding specific questions of essay writing. So, this method will help students to brainstorm ideas accurately and organise them. At the same time, they think this approach is efficient because it is more engaging and able to help the students understand and increase their comprehension before furthering or proceeding with complex information that is added in the teaching.

Even though most of the respondents think and agree on the usage of the scaffolding method in teaching writing, a few respondents do not believe it is relevant and not sure about the approach. They specify that this method is not necessary to be used in teaching writing

because they think there are different types of learners. They might be able to cope and fit with this approach and want or prefer different teaching approaches to be applied for them to engage them with the learning process of writing in the classroom. Last but not least, they state that to use this to teaching writing, the teacher itself needs to be well trained to carry out this approach, and most importantly, the teacher needs to scaffold, which means he/she needs to lend help for the students to generate ideas equally.

Based on the observation, this course did help to encounter the effectiveness of using the Scaffolding method in teaching writing and also getting to know that different learners prefer different types of teaching approach so that they will get involved more actively to learn better. Using this kind of teaching method, students are more engaged and actively performed well by using advanced technologies that help students to achieve or deliver well in their education. The usage of courseware in the English language classroom and along with the assimilation of ICT in the teaching of a subject matter, really support the students' learning (Hashim, 2010). In conclusion, TESL students prefer this scaffolding method to be applied and also propose other approaches, which would be suitable for different learners too.

## **Conclusion**

Scaffolding refers to various or different types of instructional techniques that will be applied for learners in the learning process that enhance the understanding to the next level. Based on observation, the ability to brainstorm ideas and the knowledge of learners in an essay writing were ameliorated (Al-Mahrooqi, 2015). From this, we can understand the impact of the Scaffolding method is sufficient enough. Most of the students prefer to enhance their learning in teaching writing through this method as it helps them out to acquire the writing skill very well. The different types of instructional techniques used to scaffold the ideas did improve the students' performance in learning writing.

Even though there are various types of teaching methods that are approachable such as using technologies to engage the students in the learning process, there are Mobile assisted Language Learning applications that have been transferred and applied in the language and usage of mobile devices improved the teaching styles and the English proficiency level of ESL learners (Hashim, 2017). Still, the scaffolding approach plays a vital role in generating ideas for a better writer as the views are the basic ones to start an essay. Without it, students are not able to start even a single word or are stuck in the middle of an article because they are lacking ideas to write or continue the writing based on the question or topic given.

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