

SCAFFOLDING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN PRIMARY CLASSROOMS IN UZBEKISTAN CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH TEACHING METHODOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

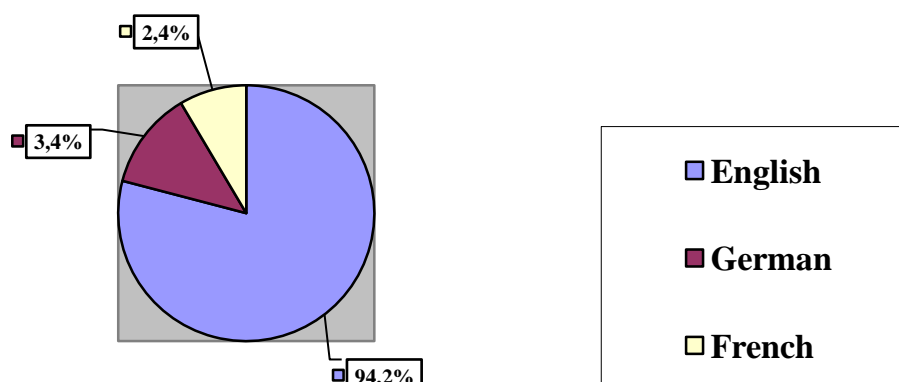
This study is concerned with illustrating how teachers provide primary classroom learners with scaffolding. The participants of the case study are instructors of young foreign language learners, students, and pupils of public schools in Namangan and Andijan regions in Uzbekistan. It is aimed at describing how young learners are being supported by two teachers in different regions and which type of scaffolding is more effective in the Uzbekistan context.

Keywords: scaffolding, ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development), primary classroom learners, substitution table, classroom survey tables, language interference.

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan's resolution "About the measures on further development of foreign language teaching and learning system" made foreign language a compulsory subject of primary education (www.lex.uz). According to the Core Curriculum renewed in 2014 all children are to learn one foreign language (especially English) from the first year of schooling, at the age of 7 (6). This decision demonstrated that the Uzbek state has finally acknowledged that learning and teaching modern foreign languages is a priority area. Since then primary foreign language education has been enjoying special attention and has been the focus of research, innovation, and practical considerations. With 9692 primary schools having an enrolment of 4116420 students in 2017, there is now an urgent demand for foreign language teachers with specific qualification to facilitate and to support learning in primary classrooms effectively (www.uzedu.uz).

Figure 1. Pupils learning foreign languages in primary classrooms in Uzbekistan



LITERATURE REVIEW

Scaffolding was introduced by Bruner, Wood, and Ross (1976) and has come about through the research of L.S.Vygotsky. Although the term has never been used by Vygotsky the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (рус.: Зона ближайшего развития, uzb.: Eng yaqin rivojlanish zonasi) is at the heart of the concept of scaffolding. Supporting children's active position in their learning and assisting them in becoming cognitive learners is at the heart of Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD. In spite of the consensus that Vygotskian socio-cultural theory and the notion of the zone of proximal development are at the heart of the concept of scaffolding (Berk 2001; Daniels 2001; Wells 2001; Krause et al, 2003; McDevitt & Ormrod 2002), the interpretations and explanations of the exact ways that scaffolding relates to it have been different. Scaffolding only partially reflects the richness of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Within educational research, the concept is now used widely (or referred to) in studies about teaching and learning in many subject-matter areas, including foreign language learning (e.g., Dunn & Lantolf, 1998; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995); with preschool children (e.g., Smith, 1993); with children's use of libraries (McKechnie, 1997); with discussions about teacher training (e.g., Jones, Rua, & Carter, 1998; Torres, 1996) and about nursing education (e.g., Spouse, 1998). This theory suggests that a child learns to walk when (s)he is physically mature enough and emotionally ready and of course with the assistance provided by adults. In the same way a child needs support within his current potential and aptitude for language learning (Cameron, 2001: 6; Moon, 2005: 75; Linse, 2005 14). Chaiklin defines three assumptions of the ZPD such as a) generality (applicable to learning all kinds of subject matter), b) assistance (learning is dependent on interventions by a more competent other), c) potential (property of the learner that permits the best and easiest learning) (Chaiklin, 2003). The term scaffolding is interpreted differently by different TEYL (Teaching English to Young Learners) experts.

C.Linse uses the term scaffolding to describe the type of support that can be given through interaction with a child's ZPD. For Linse, scaffolding means support provided by more advanced peers (Linse, 2005 14-15). But the type of scaffolding that is effective is not the same for all cultures and is only effective when it takes into account the child's culture and his or her individual characteristics. In some cultures and educational settings, less progressing learners are advised to sit with more advanced learners, because it is believed that more capable learners could provide less capable pupils with necessary support to catch up with the group. But the other side of the coin is that this might be offensive for the less progressing learner. Teachers should consider that young learners are extremely sensitive, especially to their peers, and parents may think that their child's accomplishments are being underestimated. Brown suggests letting the children to learn the subject matter at their own pace and speed and within their ZPD (Brown, 2007 102). In Uzbek culture school children show greater respect to their teachers and call them "Ustoz". "Ustoz" means the wisest scholar, helper, supporter, and educator who provides every individual with all necessary competencies to make things happen and lead a happy life.

In a wide sense, scaffolding has been interpreted as "a form of support for the development and learning of children and young people" (Rasmussen 2001, 570). Scaffolding is an umbrella term to describe the way "teachers or more competitive peers provide pupils with a necessary opportunity and support they need in order to gain a competence." In enriching our understanding of scaffolding, it is important that we keep in mind two interrelated points. First, the term scaffolding serves both as a noun and a verb (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989 [as cited in Simpson & Weiner, 1989]). There are entities that serve as scaffolds, such as

diagrams, and these entities serve an important role in instruction. However, what is most crucial is the process by which these entities are used to foster new understandings.

Regarding the fact that there has been a limited amount of research studies in scaffolding foreign language learning in primary classrooms in the Uzbekistan context, this study attempts to contribute to the field through examining how a scaffolding model works in practices of two BA candidates who are going to start their pedagogical career in primary classrooms in state schools located in Namangan and Andijan regions. In this study, we investigate how practitioner students will scaffold foreign language learning with their cooperating teachers, and in which way they will support their young learners and facilitate learning.

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this research is to examine third year students' beliefs regarding the ideal elements of scaffolding that really work to facilitate foreign language learning in primary classrooms. When we use the word "ideal" we consider the difference between the ideal and the typical. Employing an illustrative case study methodology, various data collection procedures were utilized in order to achieve triangulation, which is highly recommended while carrying out this type of investigation (Nunan, 1994). A variety of data were collected. The first data was our field notes taken during students' four observations of the cooperating teachers with students. The field notes included descriptive and reflective material tied directly to our observations (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The second source was a series of four semi-structured field interviews (Patton, 2002) conducted directly after each classroom observation. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes. Students' interview questions were guided by two sources. First, there were questions directly related to the research question (e.g., "Could you please speak to us about the school you are practicing in and your experience with your cooperating teachers?"). Additional questions were constructed in response to the observation we had just conducted (e.g., When a pupil gives a one-word response, what does your cooperating teacher usually do? - She calls on another student to turn the response into a full sentence.) In this sense, we asked many of our questions from what emerged from our conversation with the student (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Participants in this case study were two third year students from the Department of English teaching methodology of the faculty of Philology in Namangan State University. Umarkhonova Nigora is Uzbek, in her 20s, and was sent to school number 53 in Cahrtak district of Namangan region. She is paired with Mrs. Gulshoda, an Uzbek teacher in her 50s, with 30 years of experience of teaching English and 4 years of experience in teaching English to young learners. Nigora describes the school:

The school enrolls more than 1000 pupils with 8 teachers of English for teenagers (5th and 11th grades) and 2 teachers for elementary classes (1st and 4th grades). In elementary classes subjects like arithmetic, reading, writing, music, art, handcrafts (cooking, sewing, weaving, and woodworking) and sports are taught to the whole class by a single teacher. Pupils have second language (Russian) and foreign language (English) lessons with different teachers, in different classrooms equipped with modern technical aids and teaching materials. Classes are divided into groups with not more than 16 learners and each group has 2 lessons (45 minutes) a week.

Davlatova Ziyoda is Uzbek, in her mid-20s. She decided to visit school number 14 in Baliqchi district of Andijan region. Ziyoda's cooperating teacher is Mr Soliyev Baxodir, an Uzbek teacher in his mid-40s with 20 years of teaching experience and 5 years of experience in TEYL. Ziyoda says:

The school is located in the town center and it is the only school in the district in which some subjects are taught in Russian and some are taught in the pupils' native language (Content and language integrated learning school). Here pupils learn English as a foreign language. Actually all pupils in the school are bilingual and can communicate in two languages (Uzbek and Russian). Pupils in grade 1 have two 45-minute foreign language lessons per week (66 hours a year), pupils in grades 2-4 have two 45-minute lessons per week (68 hours a year) for A1 level, pupils in grades 5-9 have three 45-minute lessons per week (102 hours a year) for A2 level, pupils in grades 10-22 have three 45-minute lessons per week (102 hours a year) for B1 level according to CEFR. The school has its own tradition and experience in teaching Russian to young learners. We can assume that Russian and English languages have some similar structural parameters (subject predicate object) and lexical items (Eng. doctor – рус. доктор, – Uzb. shifokor; Eng. businessmen – Рус. бизнесмен – Uzb. ishbilarmon). Taking above mentioned it is recommendable to apply Russian teaching practices into Teaching English to Young Learners.

The purpose of this illustrative case study was to find out the best way to scaffold learning English in primary classrooms. Students were allowed to observe the classroom instructions of cooperating teachers and were also allowed to practically apply their knowledge and theories acquired from the Module of Teaching Children English, and combined with their practical experiences from the interns to enhance their capability in teaching English to young learners. Both students had a months practice and delivered classroom observations in the field and returned to the University for seminars to share their findings and to reflect on their scaffolding foreign language learning experience in fall 2017. In the seminar, the participants made slide presentations to provoke their cooperating teachers' scaffolding models. We watched the video recordings and after all had a discussion to choose "ideal" and "typical" elements of scaffolding.

RESULTS

The responses of the students given in the interview were analyzed and presented qualitatively in the findings section. The videos recorded by students and the lesson transcripts were examined by the researcher individually in order to check whether the given responses of the students to the two scales matched or not. While examining the video recordings and lesson transcripts, we took some notes and wrote our specific comments on the scaffolding styles of the cooperating teachers. The specific notes and the transcripts of the interviews served for the clearer descriptions of the teaching practices of the participants in detail. Finally, in the light of these descriptions, the researcher tried to figure out the current case thoroughly.

The collected data were analyzed to reflect the beliefs of the participants on their scaffolding foreign language learning practices in primary education settings. The participants' views on this issue were examined and discussed separately in order to depict the analysis in detail in the following section.

DISCUSSION

In this section we share our findings and interpretations.

Mrs. Gulshoda's practices to scaffold learning

The evidence of facts we collected during our observations supports that the cooperating teacher prefers the communicative approach to language teaching.

As it was observed by our student Nigora, 3rd year pupils in all experiment classes were very happy to see their teacher and as soon as the teacher appeared in the classroom it was customary for pupils to rise all together to show respect and greeted in chorus: *Good morning, good morning, good morning to you. Good morning, good morning dear teacher we are glad to see you.*

The teacher started each lesson with the same routine and every time she asked the same questions: Who is on duty today? Who is absent? What day is it today? What date is it today?

T: What day is it today?

S1: Monday.

T: Yes, it is Monday today. What day comes after Monday?

S2: Tuesday.

T: Yes, right you are. Tuesday comes after Monday.

T: By the way, who is on duty today?

S3: I am.

T: Oh, Dilshod you are on duty today. Can you tell me who is absent?

S3: Nodira.

T: Nodira is absent today, isn't she? What is the matter with her?

This demonstrates that Mrs. Gulshoda uses more classroom routines to scaffold learning. Classroom routines, which happen every day, may provide opportunities for language development. The language used in classroom management (e.g.: Sobir, please give out the papers. Marat, please give out the flash cards) provide an opportunity for pupils to predict meaning and intention, but the routine also offers a way to add variation and novelty that can involve more complex language (Cameron, 2005 10).

This was also observed in children's attitudes towards the teacher that was observed by the student during the field observations. She took into account the interest, ability, and level of the students. As it was stated, "Her pupils like to see real objects in the class; therefore she usually brings real objects." For instance, she brought small lumps of fruits and vegetables to school and flash cards to match the fruit cut outs with pictures. The pupils tasted and smelled the cut outs to guess the fruit's and vegetable's name. She taught them "I am a little tea pot" song and let them sing both in English and in Uzbek. The teacher practiced tongue twister: *A good cook took a good look at the cookery book.* What this example attempts to show is how consideration of demands, support and language learning goals can help teachers to scaffold their students' language use towards successful language learning. For the teacher scaffolding means supporting and she provides supports for the pupils by

- repeating pupils answers, which confirms the answer and provides reinforcement,
- rephrasing answers, where she adds the article which pupils have omitted,
- framing sentences and encouraging pupils to finish them,
- making her speech comprehensible (using pictures, facial expressions, miming, gestures, actions and even making noises e.g. noise of a sheep 'baa, baa', noise of a truck 'brm, brm' to support and show meaning)
- enriching pupils repertoire of formulaic chunks (e.g., How do you do? Sorry! Excuse me. You are welcome. Not at all.) The teacher believes that children are

more superior to learn by heart meaningful sentences and the most frequently used chunks help children to communicate proficiently. Besides, she mentions that native speakers also do not construct new sentence every time they communicate. Instead they prefer to select a context appropriate ready to use sentences stored in their memory.

Mr. Bahodir's scaffolding

As Z.Davlatova mentioned Mr. Bahodir advocates task-based approaches to language teaching and also believes that structuralism theory is more applicable in teaching foreign languages to young learners especially when the native language differs from English and there is very little input. It seemed to us that he helped children establish a constructive and encouraging relationship towards learning. He thinks that because of new means of communication (cellphones, Internet) nowadays reading and writing (Facebook, Telegram, E-mail) is becoming a more convenient form of communication. Besides, he argues that in the future pupils will need more literacy skills which require grammar competence. Moreover, in Uzbekistan parents want their children to successfully take entrance examinations of higher educational establishments which checks applicants' Grammatik competence.





Our student was fascinated at the way Mr. Bahodir scaffolds learning by using colorful grids, substitution tables, and classroom survey tables to support learners' production of language. The student demonstrated some samples for us used by Mr. Bahodir during the lesson to teach "meals" to 4th grade pupils.

For	breakfast	I	have	tea
	lunch	you		milk
	dinner	we		sugar
	supper	they		bread
				butter
				jam
				eggs

The teacher drew this table on the board and had a substitution drilling as a preparation for the core activity.

T: For breakfast I have tea. Ss: For breakfast I have tea.
 T: Lunch Ss: For lunch I have tea.
 T: Dinner Ss: For lunch I have tea.
 T: Supper Ss: For lunch I have tea.
 T: Milk Ss: For lunch I have milk.

This drilling was supported with action. The teacher pretended as if he was drinking something from a cup. The next preparation activity was carried with another more complex table. The class was divided into two groups and language was practiced with *eat* or *drink*. The teacher changed the flashcards to allow learners to revise all vocabulary of meals.

For	breakfast lunch dinner supper	I you we they my parents	eat	
				
			drink	
				

The final preparation activity was aimed to motivate the learner to communicate in the target language. The teacher drew this table on the table again and pupils had a short practice to ask a special question: *What do you eat (drink) for breakfast?*

What	do	you	eat	for	breakfast?
			drink		lunch?
					supper?
					dinner?

For the core activity, the teacher provided the learners with papers of classroom survey tables. As the task demand was familiar to learners the activity began immediately. Pupils worked in fours, one pupil was the interviewer, and he asked his partners about what they eat (drinks) for breakfast (lunch, dinner) and brought necessary information about target pupil. In the activity the groups competed to be the first and to write words correctly. After the task was accomplished learners constructed sentences. E.g.: *For breakfast Nodira drinks tea with sugar, eats bread with jam.*

for	breakfast	lunch	dinner	supper
you	<i>tea with sugar, bread with jam</i>	<i>hot dog with salad</i>	<i>soup with vegetables</i>	<i>cookies with fruits</i>
Nodira				
Zebo				
Yunusbek				

Homework was to write what learners’ family members eat and drink for breakfast (lunch, dinner, and supper).

We began by analyzing the environment created by the task-based approach in terms of demands on learners and support for learning. We can see how learning opportunities can be deliberately constructed by adjusting the balance between lesson goal and support. According to the syllabus the main goal of this lesson is to teach some vocabulary focused on “meals” and grammar “present simple”; prepositions *for, with, without*. The syllabus may dictate what is to be taught, but what is to be learnt can only be planned by a teacher who knows the pupils, and can make the syllabus work for them. Learning goals are objectives or intended

learning for particular learners working on particular tasks, made specific from the general learning aims of the syllabus. In setting with clear and specific language learning goals, teachers are scaffolding the task for children. Further scaffolding can involve breaking down tasks into manageable steps. It emerges that scaffolding means to break down the task to make it easy and applicable for learners within their ZPD.

The teacher also took into consideration of learners' interests. As we know that pupils learn best when they are allowed to speak about the issues concerning them and when they are involved in "here and now" activities. We assume that in early phases of foreign language teaching, substitution tables and classroom survey tables can be used to support talk and provide scaffolding which enables learners to speak or write grammatically correct sentences. They are often used to provide an opportunity for independent work for young learners who are not aware about grammatical conceptions. However they can also be used by pairs or groups where they can encourage learners to develop and extend speaking and listening skills within the context of a curriculum topic and provide an opportunity for meaningful communication.

Substitution tables can be used a) to scaffold talk, b) to scaffold writing, c) to support development of mastering to construct sentences appropriate to the target language's Grammatik parameters, d) to avoid native language's negative influence on learning a foreign language (interlanguage interference). In Uzbek language, sentence structure (Grammatik parameter of a sentence) is quite different from English and subject is usually omitted in real communication, object is followed by a predicate which takes subject as a suffixes. Eg.: Kitob o`qidim. In this example kitob = a book, o`qi = read, suffixes – dim = I. In Uzbek language sentence structure is: object – predicate – subject. E.g.: Book read I. So, we advocate that structural approach to foreign language teaching to young learners in Uzbekistan context will be beneficial to prevent native language interference and fossilization of syntactic structures.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, it is observed that both collaborating instructors are ideal teachers, who do their best and great effort to provide most effective scaffolding for foreign language learning to take place. As it was indicated by observers in the seminar, both of them took into account how their students could learn best with regards to their age, level and interest. Therefore, they wanted to use different activities and materials to help young learners to master the language. It is observed that both of the teachers place room for repetition, role-playing, singing songs, picture drawing, and coloring in their classes.

Both teachers complain about the inadequate and inappropriate text books they are supposed to use. The methodological manual "Kids' English class 1,2,3,4" consist of pupils' book, teachers' book, work book, a Multimedia DVD and a pack of didactic materials focused on language acquisition in natural way. It seems that the book might be appropriate for primary schools in Tashkent (the capital of Uzbekistan). But in Namangan region context, 350 kilometres far from the capital city, where one can hardly see an English speaking man, a road sign, an advertisement or TV program in English, language is not acquired but learned. The practicing teachers showed willingness to have more choice to select a more appropriate text book for their situation.

At the end of the seminar all students were involved in round table discussion to decide whose scaffolding is more effective. 12 of the 20 students voted for Mr. Bahodor's scaffolding in which task was broken down into steps in sequence of substitution drilling, substitution tables, and classroom survey table. Mrs. Gulshoda's practice to scaffold foreign language learning gained less interest with 8 supporters of the 20 students.

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