

Suggestions on How to Use Scaffolding to Enhance Interactional Competence in the EFL Speaking Class

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Abstract

This article reports the research evidence found from using scaffolding as an intervention in order to improve students' interactional competence (IC) in the EFL speaking class. The research was conducted at Chandrakasem Rajabhat University and thirty eight of third year English major students were participated in this study.

The empirical evidence on scaffolding for speaking class indicated that scaffolding is a flexible teaching method that can be used to assist different levels of students' speaking competency. However, to gain effectiveness and improvement, several practices are required. To achieve the ultimate goal in improving students' IC, the teacher must be keen and have great understanding towards scaffolding instructions. Similarly, the teacher must pay attention to students' speaking abilities, interests, and their limitations so each student can be assisted timely and appropriately. Lastly, the teacher must be able to demonstrate and describe his/her expectations towards students' interactional competence development clearly. Useful and supportive feedback are critical for students' improvement.

Keywords: *Scaffolding, Interactional competence, EFL speaking classroom, Feedback*

1. Introduction

Scaffolding can be defined as a form of tutorial or assistance given by the expert in order to help the novice/ learners achieve the tasks that are slightly beyond their current ability (Lipscomb, Swanson, West, 2004; Scheb-Buenner, 2013). In fact, it is one form of collaborative learning. Moreover, Oxford (1997) suggests that this method can be used to motivate students to have positive attitudes towards learning, school, classmates, and teachers. It can also use to improve students' social skills, cognitive skills, and self-esteem as well. Collaborative Learning emphasizes heavily on social constructivism that learners and teachers collaborate to share and compare their prior knowledge to create mutual understanding of a particular topic. Consequently, new knowledge to be acquired is co-constructed. Since there is no absolute structure to perform pair or group task, the degree of structure of collaborative learning is variable.

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) were the first to introduce scaffolding as a tutorial method in assisting learners to complete the tasks. They propose the six functions of scaffolding namely Recruitment, Reduction in Degrees of Freedom, Direction Maintenance, Marking Critical Features, Frustration Control, and Demonstration. After the original six functions have been introduced, Zhao and Orey (1999) have made some suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning. They pointed out that teachers must consider students' interests to do the tasks and task goals have to be explained clearly from the very beginning. In addition, since it affects directly to the effectiveness of students' performance, teachers' assistance must be given in time. Teachers have to redirect students to get back on track if they cannot do the tasks effectively. During scaffolding, teachers must give effort to describe the tasks clearly and must not interrupt students too often since the interference can block students from contributing or participating.

The scaffolding instructions have been developed by Lier again in 2004. When examine closely, it is found that Lier's adaptation emphasizes on giving proper assistance which is similar to the original one. Nonetheless, Lier points out more that teachers should be more patient to bear with students' failure that is likely to occur during scaffolding. His adaptation also extends to the differences of learners' ability that teachers should be sensitive to this aspect and be prepared to improvise along those differences. Additionally, he specifies further that teachers should encourage students to participate naturally instead of forcing them to participate when they are not ready. Importantly, Lier has created the new instruction called

'handover/takeover' explaining that this instruction occurs when students understand and know how to comprehend the input. Once the acquisition occurs, students will have more confidence and learn to take over and do the tasks by themselves.

The examples of scaffolding instructions above reveal that the early adaptation largely emphasizes mainly on the teachers' instructions that teachers must learn to deal with various levels of students' proficiency properly. As a result, vague directions were invented as guidelines to help teachers cope up with such difficulty. Because explicit instructions are not yet given, it provokes the attention of scholars in the later stage to modify scaffolding instructions more explicitly and promptly to be used. Bradley and Bradley (2004, p.1) suggest three types of scaffolding instructions to teach L2 learners in the U.S. The three types of scaffolding are Simplifying the language, Asking for completion not generation, and Using visuals. Further, Clark and Graves (2005, p.570-579) suggested three effective scaffolding strategies to enhance students' comprehension of text including Moment-to-moment verbal scaffolding, Instructional frameworks that foster content learning, and Instructional procedures for teaching reading comprehension strategies. Additionally, Pentimonti and Justice (2010, p. 246-247) divided scaffolding strategies into two levels: high and low.

To enhance more interactions between students, the researcher also proposed 'negotiation of meaning' as the teaching method used with scaffolding in the classroom. Long (1983) gave the interaction hypothesis that students have to interact to 'negotiate for meaning' so they can learn to modify the input. Through the modification, the input will be comprehensible and students will be able to reach the acquisition. Foley (2012, p. 59-60) described further about the strategies that can be used in meaning negotiation. The five strategies include Comprehensible check, Confirmation check, Clarification requests, Requests for repetition, and Self-repetition or paraphrase.

Hence, in this research, the researcher aims to find feedbacks from using scaffolding and negotiation of meaning as teaching methods in order to enhance students' IC. Suggestions and examples will be provided to give other researchers ideas and preparation of implementing scaffolding in their class.

2. Objectives

To investigate evidence gained from using scaffolding teaching method to improve interactional competence in and EFL speaking class.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Participants

Seventy two of third year English major students who enrolled in ENGL3203 Course in both sections 101 and 102 were the target population of the study. However, only 38 students who enrolled in section 102 volunteered allowed the researcher to record videos of their group discussions throughout the Course. Therefore, the data were collected from the volunteered group.

All participants were asked to take a speaking test in order to measure their English communicative level. After, they were sorted into groups (with mixed English communicative competency) of 5-6 people for group discussion. For each discussion, each group has 10-15 minutes to discuss the given topic and questions. The topic has been given to students in advance so they can do some research and find more information to be used in the discussion. However, students were required to discuss questions related to the given topic and they were required to answer these questions spontaneously without having much time for preparation.

Participants were asked to scaffold and participate in 8 group discussions and scaffolding feedbacks were gathered from those sessions. To gain feedbacks, three research instruments were used: video recordings of participants' group discussions, questionnaire, and teacher journal.

3.2 Research Instruments

3.2.1 Video Recordings of Participants' Group Discussions

The video recordings helped the researcher to see more details of scaffolding teaching instructions, students' interactions and feedback, and learning atmospheres in the classroom. The evidences were also used as the back-up to support the findings.

3.2.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was translated in Thai to make it easy for students to comprehend and respond. Before being used, it was piloted and validated by the three experts. Students were asked to rate their satisfaction and give feedback towards the teaching contents, the teaching performance, the teaching activities, evaluation, and the benefits of scaffolding teaching method.

3.2.3 Teacher Journal

After each class ended, the researcher (as the instructor) wrote a journal to record details as follows: problems that occurred during the class, students' improvements and students' weak points. The journal records were used to support and expand the research findings.

In this research, the scaffolding intervention was divided into 3 stages: 1) orientation, 2) during intervention, and 3) after intervention. The framework is adapted from Brown and Broemmel (2011); Clark and Graves (2005) scaffolding frameworks. The processes of each stage are being described in the table below.

Stage 1: Orientation

Table 1 Scaffolding Framework

Stage 1: Orientation	Stage 2: During Intervention	Stage 3: After Intervention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduce a topic and relate the topic to students ▪ Motivate students to think along and participate ▪ Help students recall prior background knowledge ▪ Give demonstration ▪ Pre-teaching concepts and suggesting strategies ▪ Simplify lessons ▪ Provide supportive materials such as handouts, video clips, or pictures to increase students' understanding ▪ Give support as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ask students to present their findings ▪ Ask students to negotiate meaning (predict, compare & contrast, prove the effectiveness, discuss the feasibility, etc.) ▪ Ask students to give reasons and supportive examples ▪ Ask students to think beyond the context and discuss to reflect reality and share opinions within their cultures. ▪ Give support as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build connection to bridge students' prior knowledge to new knowledge they have learned. ▪ Conclude the discussion and highlight the consensus/mutual agreement ▪ Provide feedbacks ▪ Re-teach if needed ▪ Evaluate the students' performance

4. Results

The suggestions will be divided into three stages of how scaffolding should be implemented in the EFL speaking class.

4.1 Orientation

1) Before the orientation period, as Lier stated teachers should tolerate students' failure and differences in their speaking ability. Hence, the teacher should give each student a speaking test to establish their English speaking ability. This will greatly help the teacher to be able to put students into the right groups

where the more capable can help the less fluent ones. However, if there are too many weak students in a group, frustration is likely to occur when students cannot help each other. The evidence from questionnaire revealed that students enjoyed speaking English in groups according to various reasons as follows:

“I feel good to work with friends who have different speaking abilities. We help each other in the group discussion. I feel more relaxed to speak English with them because whenever I encounter any problems they always support me”.

Source: Questionnaire No. 20

“I can speak English because my friends and teacher help me. When I forget some words or cannot explain something, I know I’m not alone and they can help others to understand what I want to say”.

Source: Questionnaire No. 3

“Although I feel tired to do research and speak English every class, I feel enjoyable to assist my friends in group discussion and help them to describe in a more understanding way”.

Source: Questionnaire No. 7

2) To implement scaffolding in the classroom, the teacher should follow the stages or steps in the framework which can be quite time consuming. In other words, scaffolding is suitable to be implemented in an extended class (3-4 hours) rather than a shorter class (1-1.30 hours). In case of shorter hour class, the present researcher suggests that the teacher should minimize and adapt the processes in the framework to fit the teaching hours. Additionally, the framework must be piloted and adapted before actual use so it fits students’ ability and the teaching hours available.

3) Teachers must prepare well to create effective scaffolding lessons. They not only need to have a good understanding of the contents/subjects being taught, but they also need to have a good understanding the implementation of scaffolding as well. Here are some examples of how the teacher used scaffolding in an EFL speaking class. Below, the researcher demonstrates some scaffolding instructions used in this study through the transcription of students’ group discussions from the videos. Conversations were transcribed according to what students said (without correcting their grammar). To fully understand the examples, some abbreviations and symbols are described as follows:

=	=	To signify obvious pausing of an ongoing utterances
?	=	To indicate rising intonation
/ /	=	To show overlaps and interruptions
TT	=	The teacher
capital letters	=	Students’ names
.	=	longer pauses between the conversations

Example 1: Negotiation of meaning

Source: Scaffolding 1 Group 1

Topic: The most memorable movie

NA: They= play together= in a park near= their home err=Nobita is a very timid= and he also foolish/

TT: /Timid= can you describe the meaning of the word timid. Do you know the meaning of the word timid ((Asked class))/

Class: /No/

NA: So= scared ((Wrong pronunciation))= or= can’t do not anything with himself/

TT: /So he is not confident?/

NA: Yes

TT: /You got it now? ((Asked class))/
 Class: /Yes/
 TT: /Because I can see their faces= when you said timid ((TT saw suspicious faces in the class))/
 Note: The teacher negotiated meaning with Na by asking him to describe the meaning of the word ‘timid’ since Na’s explanation about Nobita’s character was not clear. The teacher also helped the group members to fully understand Na’s explanation as well so they can interact in the group discussion easier.

Example 2: Frustration control

Source: Scaffolding 1 Group 1

Topic: The most memorable movie

N: What are the pros/cons that= what we have from watching cartoon Doraemon

V: Yes pro is= Nobita is have a good friend= yes and= have many friends but friends harm him because he have Doraemon to help each other to go everywhere/
 T: /Nobita= can’t do anything= by himself?/
 N: /So that is a con?/
 TT: /It’s a con yes/
 Na: /I think err...= the pro in this movie= Nobita= foolish and timid and= his friends also angry him= and fight him= but the last they will forgive him all the time/
 TT: /So it’s about forgiveness?/
 Na: Yes
 TT: /Ah= the good point that you have seen from the movie is forgiveness/
 Na: Yes
 TT: /Very good/

Note: As you can see from the example, even though students had problems in explaining the pro and con of watching Doraemon cartoon, the teacher allowed them to fully elaborate their ideas without interrupting. When N corrected V that what she said was actually the con rather than the pro, the teacher confirmed the correct answer without breaking V’s face. By performing as a facilitator and giving opportunities for students to fully express their ideas, it helped students to feel relaxed and discuss more openly with confidence and hence could help control the level of frustration in speaking English.

4) Teachers should make opportunities available for students to speak English on the topics they are interested in. To do so, teachers should investigate their interests in advance or offer a number of topics for students to choose. When students have more freedom to choose the topics, they will feel less uncomfortable to speak English and feel more at ease in topics they are interested in.

5) The teacher should elaborate how he/she expects students to interact in class with specific class rules. Students should understand what the teacher expects of them, for example, students should be aware that they have to speak English in the class and that they can’t simply read directly from notes. For instance, they can use translanguaging and ask the teacher or the group members to translate Thai words into English.

4.2 During the intervention

The teacher should not force, but encourage students to participate. The teacher may ask the groups to volunteer and decide on the topics to discuss. This strategy can help reduce stress and bring out students’ willingness to speak. While students are discussing, the teacher should not interrupt or try to correct students’ mistakes all the time. Unnecessary interruptions will cause students to lose confidence and often disrupt the flows of the lesson. The teacher should always allow students to finish delivering what they want to say. In case where they produce confused utterances, the teacher can ask to check what they wanted to convey. Moreover, the teacher should not over emphasize grammatical mistakes. If the mistakes do not cause any communication breakdowns or misunderstanding, they should be allowed to finish their turns. To facilitate

better flow in group discussion, in case group members have low speaking efficiency, the teacher may give them some time to discuss before further participation the speaking activities. It may also occur that participants in the group found it hard to understand one another when there have lower speaking proficiency than other members in the group. To solve this problem, the teacher should consider to summarize main ideas, simplify, or rephrase ambiguous utterances. This facilitation may enhance students to be more focused and maintain their direction in group discussion. In the case of students' variation in opinions, the teacher may help categorize their opinions and help them bring out group consensus. As for students with a high level of proficiency in speaking, the teacher should give them more opportunities to perform more complicated tasks such as giving clear examples to support their points, comparing his/her opinion with others, making a prediction, or analyzing the pros and cons. Teachers should encourage highly competent students to share and make contributions to other group members.

4.3 After intervention stage

It is important for the teacher to give feedback to each group- as well as giving overall comments on their group performance. Teachers need to point out students' errors or weaknesses clearly with examples and suggest how to minimize such errors or weaknesses in the future. Apart from pointing out the mistakes, it is also important for the teacher to give praises on students' performance as well. Praises should be given for both group and individual performances. At the end of each class, the teacher should summarize common mistakes, what they have achieved, and what the teacher is looking forward to see improved in the future. Finally, the teacher should provide opportunities for students to give feedback and share their opinions of how the discussion should be next time and in what way they need help from the teacher.

In terms of benefits, the researcher found many benefits in using scaffolding as follows:

1) Scaffolding motivated students to develop their roles in discussion. Students have learned to develop their roles to take turn to be the group leader, supporter, and learn to compromise and accept different ideas among group members. Based on the evidence from the video recording, at the beginning of scaffolding sessions, most group discussions were mainly dominated by students who have the best English communicative skills in groups. Students who were leaders had to take turns many times because they were responsible to perform many roles such as introducing the topic, leading group members to discuss given questions, encouraging passive group members to take turns, assisting group members in discussion, passing turns, and concluding the discussion. However, through number of practicing, students learned to minimize the leader's burdens as shown in the given example.

Example

Source: Scaffolding 4 Group 6

Topic: Wild animals should stay wild

- P: So the first question is err= please share problems about wild animals we know. Do any of you know any problem about these wild animals?
- R: Sometime even animal dangerous because err= for example=people want to find food in the forest and then=while find food err=animal is very dangerous to come bit him=and he dead=but the animal don't know about their extinct=yes next?
- N: It's like a elephant come to err=eat some fruit in vill=village because err= we invaded to their home=yes
- SUK: err= I saw that my friend bought baby lion from the wild to be pet=and when it grow up=it always bit a leg people in the house= and people get it back to the wild=but after that lion is died because they never know how to live in the wild
- TT: /Very good/
- P: The next question is=why did people kill or attack wild animals?

Note: From the example, student divided their roles in the group discussion as follows:

- P was responsible to state the given questions to group members.
- R, N, and SUK were responsible to answer and give support points.
- P and R were responsible to pass turns to other group members.

2) Scaffolding encouraged students to organize their ideas and the delivery of discussion better. In order to express their ideas to others, students learned to use transitions to organize their discussion and to give some background to prompt audiences before introducing their points of view. As can be seen from the example in number (1), R used the word “*next*” to guide other group members to continue her conversation whereas P used the phrases “So the first question is...” and “The next question is...” as transitions to guide the group members to participate.

3) Scaffolding helped students to think more logically since the process encouraged them to do some research, share ideas, and compare their findings with group members. Hence, students could offer logical and valid concrete examples to support their points. Students were able to describe information they researched from their understanding, not by reading as the example shown below.

Example

Source: Scaffolding 4 Group 1

Topic: Should government provide shelters for homeless?

N: Ok for me= the government= must= support them= because according to the constitution of the kingdom of Thailand 2017= section55 announced that= the state shall ensure that the people receive efficient= public health service= universally it means everyone should get it= It’s the reason why government= must= support them. Finally= the thing that= I want to say is =homeless is like us= not different from us= just they don’t have place to go= they don’t have opportunity to do= so give them a chance= to live with us= as possible as you can= thank you.

Note: N quoted Thai constitution and described why the government must take care of Thai citizens’ health universally including homeless.

4) After several classes using scaffolding, students should be able to discuss topics that are complex and require greater explanation.

5) Scaffolding promotes students to work in group and allows them to discuss enjoyably with group members. Students feel satisfied that they can share knowledge and experiences in the speaking classroom. The results from questionnaire revealed that 18 students (50.01%) strongly agreed that scaffolding promoted students to exchange ideas through classroom activities. In the same way 19 students (52.78%) agreed that scaffolding promoted them to share experiences and feelings to classmates.

6) Scaffolding motivates students to feel more confident to speak English in the class as the evidence from the questionnaire showed that 19 students (52.78%) strongly agreed that scaffolding helped them to feel more confident to speak English better in an individual task.

7) Scaffolding helps students improve their social skills since they have to adjust to work with others and learn to compromise when disagreements occur.

8) Scaffolding motivates students to expand their knowledge, recall, and recycle the vocabulary they found while doing research to be used in the class. This helps improve the speaking contents of their group discussion as well.

5. Discussion

Scaffolding is a teaching method that offers great flexibility in teaching. The teacher is allowed to use different scaffolding instructions to assist students to complete each task in the class. Likewise, this intervention can be used to teach different levels of students' speaking competency. To gain effectiveness in teaching, the teacher requires to practice and implement this type of teaching several times. For students, to enhance interactional competence in speaking English, they should have opportunities to scaffold and have group discussion under the given topics for at least 4 to 6 times.

6. Conclusion

Scaffolding is a teaching method that requires the teacher to devote great effort to create framework, plan teaching activities, monitor and assist students while working on speaking activities. Consequently, before implementing it in the classroom, the teacher needs to pay great attention to understand students' speaking abilities, interests, and their limitations. It is important for the teacher to have well understanding of scaffolding instructions as well so the teacher can respond to assist students timely and appropriately. Significantly, the teacher must be able to demonstrate and give clear explanations of his/her expectations towards students' interactional competence development. This is because students learn from their mistakes, friends, and teacher's comments.

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