Original Article
IASR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Website: https://iasrpublication.com/ijhss/journal
ISSN (online): 2583-3235
Page No : 10-17

Scaffolding As A Method Of Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines scaffolding as a method of teaching Igbo language to pre-school age, using actions, images and pronunciation practices (sensory, instruction and interactive methods) as a theoretical framework. Interactive models and language requires that scaffolding method enhances performance on assessment of task. Its specific objectives are to investigate the prospects and challenges of scaffolding as a method of teaching Igbo to pre-school age. The study revealed that scaffolding is individualized instructional method that possesses the biggest challenges for the teacher. The study also revealed that teachers' manuals do not have scaffolding method for specific lesson content. However, the study reveals that scaffolding is effective in teaching preschool age.

Keywords: *Challenges, method, pre-school age, prospects, scaffolding*

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

In construction, scaffolding is a temporary structure used to support a work crew and provide access to the materials necessary for building, maintenance and repairs. The philosophy is similar in educational scaffolding and works almost the same way. The difference is that the goal to build independence in children. The idea is that children can more readily understand new lessons and concepts if they have support as they are learning. Scaffolding can involve teaching a child something new by building on what they already know or can do, in other words, it is a method employ in teaching (see Imu 2018, Imu & Amazu 2023).

Scaffolding method is a teaching strategy that originated from Lev Vygotsky socio-cultural theory and his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development as the distance between when children can do by themselves and the next learning that can be helped to achieve with competence assistance (Raymond, 2000, p. 176). The scaffolding teaching method provides individualized support based on the learner's ZPD (Chung, Sung, and Chen, 2002).

In scaffolding method, a more knowledgeable other (parents, teachers, peers and others) provides scaffolds or supports to facilitate the learner's development. The scaffolds facilitate the learners' ability to build on prior knowledge and internalize new information. The activities provided in scaffolding instruction are just beyond the level of what the learner can do alone (Olson, & Pratt, 2000). The more capable other provides the scaffolds, enables the learner to accomplish (with assistance), the tasks he or she could otherwise not compute, thus helping the learner through the ZPD (Bransford, & Cocking, 2000).

Vygotsky defined scaffolding method of teaching as the "role of teachers and others in supporting the learner's development and providing support structures to get to the next stage or level (Raymond, 2000, p. 176). An important aspect of scaffolding method is that the scaffolds are temporary. As a learner's abilities increase, the scaffolding provided by the more knowledgeable other is progressively withdrawn. Then the learner is able to complete the task or master the concept independently (Chun, Sung, and Chen, 2002, p.7). The goal of the teacher when using the scaffolding method therefore is for the student to become an independent and self-regulating learner and a problem-solver (Hartman, 2002).

In preschool therefore, scaffolding involves providing the right kind of assistance when a child is working to accomplish a task. This idea was coined by Lev Vygotsky who emphasized the importance of apprenticeship and instruction early cognitive development. As the children's knowledge and learning competency increases, the teacher gradually reduces the supports provided (Ellis, Larking, & Worthington nd.). According to Vygotsky the external

scaffolds provided by the teacher can be removed because the learner has developed … more sophisticated cognitive systems, related to fields of learning such as (Igbo) language, the system of knowledge itself becomes part of the scaffold or social support for the new learning (Raymond, 2000, p.176).

Teachers help young children to learn how to link old information or familiar situations with new knowledge through verbal and non-verbal communication and modelling behaviours. Observational researches on early childhood learning show that parent and others (teachers) facilitated learning by providing scaffolds. The scaffolds provided are activities and tasks that:

- Motivate or enlist the child's interest related to the task;
- Simplify the tasks to make it more manageable and acceptable for a child;
- Provide some direction in order to help the child focus on achieving the goal;
- Clearly indicate differences in order to help the child's work and the standard or desirable solution;
- Reduce frustration and risk;
- Model and clearly define the expectations of activity to be performed (Bransford, Brown, &Cocking, 2000).

In the educational setting, scaffolding may include modes, cues, prompts, hints, partial solution think aloud modelling and direct teaching (Hartman, 2002). In language learning for instance, the teacher should discover that the learners learn in many ways and strive to develop practices that help the learners understand and interact with new information or skills. This is what makes the job of a teacher so unique. It is important therefore that teachers take the time to meet the specific language learning needs of each student as he/she progress through his/her course of learning. To this end, the teacher can break down language learning into easily manageable units of materials that build fluency step-by-step. This process is called scaffolding method.

Scaffolding is an educational process in which teachers' model and demonstrates how to solve a problem and then step back, offering support as needed. Scaffolding is a way to support individuals learning language to more complicated language. Scaffolding language means helping learners to learn a new skill by building on skills that they already have. Adults too, support the learner by talking to him/her in different ways. Scaffolding helps a student learn new skills by building on skills that they already know. As they learn the new skills the adults can reduce the amount of support they give. According to Vygotskey "what a child can do with assistance today, he will be able to do by himself tomorrow". Scaffolding can be used by all the adults to a child, including the parents by providing language support at the right level for a child so that he can really make a difference to his talking and understanding especially among the pre-school age and beyond. A pre-school child is a 3-5 years of age who is not yet attending a public or private kindergarten programme or who do not attend full day kindergarten.

In every lesson, teachers begin by ensuring that there is a clear connection by ensuring already known and to what the students are about to learn. Without something to build upon, students can struggle and then often disengage from learning. Once the background knowledge is built and the connection made the scaffolding can then be removed. A good example is the importance of pre-viewing and pre-teaching vocabulary on advance of a particular assignment. Without this vital step, it is unrealistic to assume that second language (L_2) learners can look for a word in a dictionary and understand their meaning or their contextual use. The scaffolding technique practicable for the pre-school age is direct instruction and pronunciation.

However, direct instruction and pronunciation practiced can be helpful to build upon the words or phrases that they already know, though the aim of using scaffolding is to make language accessible to a learners and help them move on to the next stage. Using scaffolding relies on the teacher knowing the language level of the child he is working with. Examples, the most common scaffolding techniques one might use in practice for the pre-school age includes:

- Repeat what the child says the correct way, for example, "tar", "yes", "a car" (in Igbo (Ụgbo ala).
- Say it again in different way, for example "milk gone" – "yes is finished" (in Igbo, "milki agwụla kpam, kpam"). You have drank it all ("i ńuchala ya"). This will help children learn new words in Igbo and other languages as well.
- Repeat and extend, for example, yes milk have all gone – ("ee, milki agwụchala kpam, kpam"). You have drunk it all – ("i ńuchala ya"). This helps children learn to speak in longer sentences and so on.

1.2 Statement of the problem

When a teacher incorporates scaffolding in the classroom, he becomes more of a mentor or a facilitator rather than the dominant content expert. The method of scaffolding does not give the full consideration of the learner's needs, interest and abilities. The method lacks specific examples and tips in the teachers' editions and/or text books.

1.3 Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the prospects and challenges of scaffolding as a method of teaching Igbo to pre-school age.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical studies

Scaffolding instruction as a teaching method originated from Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and his concept of the Zone of proximal Development (ZPD). Lev vygotsky's was a Soviet Psychologist whose works were suppressed upon his death in the 1930s and were not discovered by the West until the late 1950s (Lev Vygotsky's achieve n.d). His socio-cultural theory proposes that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition ("Social Development Theory" n.d.). Vygotsky "… theorized that learning occurs through participation in social or culturally embedded experiences" (Raymond 2000 p. 176).

In Vtgotstky's view, the learner does not learn in isolation instead learning is strongly influenced by social interactions which take place in meaningful contexts. Children's social interaction with more knowledge and capable others in their environment significantly impacts their ways of thinking and interpreting situations. A child develops his intellect through internalizing concepts based on his own interpretations of an activity that occurs in a social setting with more knowledgeable or capable others (parents, teacher, peers, others) who helps the child construct a wider standing of the concept (Bransford, Brown and cocking, 2000). The communication helps the child develop inner or egocentric speech. The inner speech is abbreviated speech for oneself that eventually directs personal cognitive activities.

Inner speech is developed as the adult initially models a cognitive process and communicates the steps in a "think-aloud" modeling, "… overviews and through repeated experiences the child begins to internalize and assumes responsibility for the dialogical actions (i.e. it becomes a private speech" spoken aloud by the child to direct personal cognitive activity "(Ellirs, Larking, Worthington n.d.) principle 5 research section, para 3).

In subsequent similar activities, the amount and type of modelling and guidance provided by the more knowledgeable other will be reduced until the child is able to complete the activity. Without these supports or scaffolds, the child's inner speech would be directing the child's activities. Scaffolding instruction has different methods. Examples include instruction and jigsaw methods.

2.2 Empirical studies

Owumanam (2020) did a study on scaffolding and language development. She observed that scaffolding works to maintain the child's potential level of development in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZDP is the field between what a learner can do by himself (expert page) and the most that he can achieve with the support of a knowledgeable peer or instructor (pedagogical stage). An essential element of ZPD and scaffolding is the acquisition of language. This study is similar to the present study but differ in that the present study is on pre school age language acquisition.

Riddeth (2015) looked at the teaching language cycle using scaffolding method. He used sensory, graphic and interactive scaffolding methods in teaching cycle to provide various forms of scaffolding to support teaching and performance on assessments because learning new content that is often abstract is difficult enough; learning is in an unfamiliar language adds a level of difficulty that native speakers do not experience. Scaffolding provides language learners with greater access to content and facilitates the demonstration of their learning. This study is similar to the present study as both used scaffolding method but differ as the present study is on pre school age language learning acquisition using direct instruction and pronunciation practice.

3.3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this paper is Brunner's positive interaction and three modes of representation during teaching; actions images and language including sensory, graphic and interactive models.

2.4 Summary of literature review

The literature above shows that a lot have not been done using scaffolding as an instruction method and also using theoretical framework within their minimalist programme. This paper investigated scaffolding method of teaching Igbo language in NINLAN pre-school age using direct instruction and pronunciation practices. The literature also looked at scaffolding and empirical studies of scaffolding.

3. Scaffolding as a method of teaching Igbo language to pre-school age

Scaffolding is a metaphor for providing students with temporary supportive structures that, just like in construction are gradually removed as the building nears completion (Riddeth 2015). When a student demonstrates proficient independence, the scaffolds is no longer needed (Gibbon, 2002). There are also three groups of categorization in using scaffolding apart from actions, images and languages. These are sensory, graphic and interactive scaffolding modes which can be incorporated during the lesson cycle or within an assessment task.

Scaffolding begins when the teaching at the level the students can understand and then builds on that understanding. The teacher then presents the problem and thinks aloud as they go about solving it. In the process, they show how a

solution is arrived at by combining actions, images, and language. The students then do the following: example, if a student is struggling with sentence fragments, the teacher might scaffold the problem in the following way: first, present an example of a sentence fragment, example, "if you eat all of these biscuits". ("ọburu na irie achicha nile aa"). The teacher asks students questions to engage their participation. Each answer right or wrong receives a positive response. Once the students demonstrate their ability to do the work on their own, the teacher fades or steps away, but remain available for further instruction when needed.

3.1 Pre-school age

Pre-school is known as nursery school/pre-primary school/play school /crèche, is an educational establishment or learning space offering early childhood education to children before they begin compulsory education at primary school. Pre-school age means a child who is older than a toddler and younger than school age. It can mean a child who is between 30 months of age and the age of eligibility to enter kindergarten. They follow the same schedule of school age children in the school distinct where they live regardless of whether or not other school age children live in the family. In preschool education, scaffolding involves providing the right kind of assistance example, in vocabulary teaching and learning. For some children for instance, writing things down helps them to remember better. For others we know using visual examples help them to fully understand.

Scaffolding method in preschool is defined by the use of demonstrations and intentional support offered by the teacher. This method allows a child to learn large concepts in small units. The goal is to guide, uplift and provide boundaries for children as they learn and grow. The techniques involve show and tell; that is demonstrating something by modeling it and then explaining it. The illustration of a physical thing is a great way to lead into a verbal explanation. See example below

Fig.1. show and tell

Another method is guided think out aloud time. In this method the teacher guides them to think critically about problems. Encourage in-depth learning through slow, easy steps while narrating the teachers thinking. Scaffolding method for preschool also requires the teacher to introduce terms with images or by example like the following below.

Fig.2. Guided think out aloud time

Without scaffolding, language learners would struggle needlessly to access grade-level content and are less able to perform well academically. Research shows that there is a significant body of research around the practice of using scaffolding to support instruction. Example;

- Instructional supports empower students to achieve academically (Gottlieb, 2013).
- Using a range of variety of instructional support tools enables language learners to engage with grade-level objectives and content (Gottlieb, Katz, & Ernst-Starit 2009, Himmele and Himmel, 2009).
- Instructional supports can also be built into assessments to empower language learners to express their understanding and demonstrate their skills (Gottlieb, 2006).

Another example is by using sensory scaffolding allows language learners to use their senses to understand abstract concepts or learn new ideas. For most children, using visual and manipulative scaffolds are effective forms of sensory

scaffolding because images and gestures contain meaning without a dependence on language. Example, below is children working alone without support.

Fig.3. sensory scaffolding

As much as human beings are visual learners, they are also social learners too. This is why in addition to sensory and tactile support; teachers should integrate social interaction into the lesson design. For language learners, social scaffolding is an existing opportunity to use language and content to discuss ideas, offer observations and form opinions. In the process, they synthesize content knowledge and internalize language. Interactive scaffolds are essentially a kind of learning through collaboration and are best used with language learners who like to socialize.

Example: Preschool teacher who wants to introduce the following vocabularies or words in English can use the following table to explain them in Igbo Language while the children are vocalizing the names of the images with the teacher in Igbo and English.

Table 1

	English	**Igbo**	**Image**
A	Eye	Anya	
B	Egg	Akwa	
C	Ball	Bọọlu	
D	Hand	Aka	
E	Teeth	Eze	

In early child education, scaffolding can be implemented in many ways, for example once a child recognizes a specific letter, you can teach the sound that it makes. Next, you can move on to words that start with sounds example "A" → Aka (hand) and how it jams together. Example below

Fig.4: Hand clapping.

Scaffolding involves breaking learning into units to make the material or skill easier for the pupils to master. For example, if you were to use scaffolding with learning to read or pronounce words, you might talk about some of the words example; "A" → Aka (hand) , Anya (eye) , Akwa (egg) .

The key is that you are breaking things down so that the children are better able to learn something new. Scaffolding is useful because it helps young children who are new to a school environment to build confidence while learning. Also if a gives a wrong answer to a question, a teacher using a scaffolding method can use that incorrect response coupled with a previously learned skill to help the child come to the correct conclusion.

There are many ways to offer a support to a preschooler such as giving specific instructions, providing demonstration or offering general encouragement. The preschool teachers help children when they vary their strategy according to the progress the children is making. For example, see the picture below showing a child who has completed building block

Fig.5: building blocks

Now, the above picture shows that the child is one the right track to completing the task of building block support should be less specific. If the child starts struggling, there should be more encouragement, more specific instructions and demonstration should be provided so that the child can make progress towards the goal. Example; if a child is pronouncing "a" "a" "a" the teacher should help the child to make and a pronouncement of "aka" (hand) by showing the child the image of aka (hand) or "akwa" (egg) etc.

3.2 Prospects of scaffolding method

Scaffolding provides top-down support which can be a very effective teaching method for language learning. For instance, think of scaffolding like a ladder, you have a lot of support of the bottom, but as you climb higher and higher, you get less support introducing a new concept you need to provide a lot support to your learners. As they build on understanding, they require less help from the teacher.

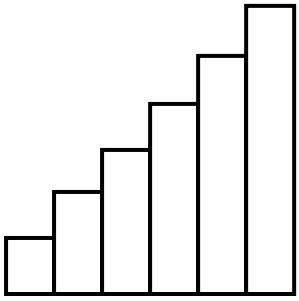

Fig 6: Ladder

Image of a ladder shows scaffolding/support.

Scaffolding helps students to see and grow. It is flexible in format; it is common for concepts to be taught one way to all students. This restricts students to one kind of learning and for some, this makes comprehending information extremely difficult. With scaffolding the lesson can be to the learning style of the student. For example, when a preschooler is struggling to comprehend a vocabulary, the teacher could preview the text and offer visual examples of key vocabulary and concepts like A → Anya (eye) etc. Scaffolding leaves room for all types of people to learn the same thing in a way that makes sense to them.

Scaffolding provides confidence with a structured set of steps to reach levels that once looked too challenging. Scaffolding can help children move from feeling overwhelmed to self-assured. The classroom can becomes a safe space to process information and grow in new knowledge. It encourages growth at all competence levels.

The academic capabilities of children are not uniform. Scaffolding methods focused less on uniformity in test result and more on providing an attainable path to individual growth. It helps identity gaps in understanding. Scaffolding seeks to erase confusion. It helps to identify gaps between what a child knows and what they still have to learn. This requires a consistent assessment of progress. Example as the child learns. They should be able to explain or discuss a concept without guidance. As the teacher do less, the pupils do more. However, scaffolding zeros in on the pupils and considers how they are receiving the information, it asks, are they understanding the whole concept or just pieces?

3.3 Challenges of scaffolding method

Despite the prospects, a handful of factors have led teachers to shy away from using scaffolding methods in their classroom. It requires significant time planning. Depending on the subject and circumstance, the up-front workload for

using scaffolding method can be tasking. For instance, choosing activities that can cater to different styles is time consuming and complicated. It requires creativity and flexibility. This is true for teacher.

Another difficulty lies on understanding who the teacher is teaching. As a teacher lay out his lesson plans, it is important to identify the strength and weaknesses of your pupils and this can be difficult to nail down. Some children are drawn to words or languages, while others can take a random assortment of items and construct advice. Thus, knowing where they are strong will help to stretch the places they are weak.

Another difficulty lies on knowing when to let go. As with constructing scaffolding, a pivotal part of this process is the removal of the scaffolding itself. It is a careful balance. If the scaffolding is left too long, it can cause a child to take steps backward, or it can become a sort of comfort zone as the child never learns to stand on his own. If it is left long enough, he child will remain stuck, unable to see progress.

Unless properly trained, teacher may not properly implement scaffold instructions and therefore not see the full effect. Scaffold requires that the teacher should give up some of the control and allow the students to make errors. Finally, teachers' manuals and curriculum guides that have been exposed to, do not include examples of scaffolding or outlines of scaffolding methods that would be appropriate for the specific lesson content. Although, there are some setbacks to the use of scaffolding as a teaching method, the positive impact it has on students learning and development is far more important.

4.1 Summary of findings

The study reveals that scaffolding is individualized so it can benefit each learner and also possess the biggest challenges for the teacher since developing the supports and scaffolding lessons to meet the needs of each student would be extremely time consuming.

The study also revealed that unless teachers are properly trained for this scaffolding methods they would not see the full effect. It also revealed that unless teachers would give up some of the control and allow students to make errors, it may be difficult for teachers to have full effect. The study revealed that teachers' manuals do not have scaffolding methods for the specific lesson contents provided for teaching and learning instructions.

4.2 Conclusion

The study reveals a handful of arguments. A number of issues are involved in the postulated issues in the analysis. The scaffolding technique required that instructional methods and its categorical (group interactive modes, support/scaffolding methods) enhances performance on assessment of tasks. In a nutshell, scaffolding method is effective in language learning but has its own prospects and challenges as a teaching method.

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