

The Effects of Teacher Scaffolding Techniques on High School Students' EFL Writing: East Wollega Zone in Focus

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Abstract

From the perspective of sociocultural theory (SCT), instructional scaffolding is the systematic sequencing of prompted content, materials, tasks, and teacher and peer support to optimize learning (Dickson, Chard, & Simmons, 1993). In principle, in the scaffolding process, a teacher as an expert is necessary to advance the learners' zone of proximal development (ZPD). The present study, therefore, examines the effects of teacher's scaffolding techniques employment on students' EFL paragraph writing skills. More specifically, it was an attempt to investigate the effects of teacher scaffolding techniques on high school students EFL paragraph writing through whole-class scaffolding East Wollega in focus. To this end, two grade nine intact sections of Arjo high school students took part in the study which was based on quasi-experimental pre-test post-test design. The participants (i.e control and experimental group) were administered pre-test and posttest which were prepared by the researcher and subject teachers before and after the treatments. After the necessary data were collected, inter-rater reliability coefficients of the pre- and post-test reliability were calculated in Pearson product moment correlations. Paired Samples Test was used to analyze the students' mean scores on the pre-test and the post test using SPSS. The results showed that the scaffolding instruction group outperformed the control group in their overall paragraph writing performance. Hence, teacher's scaffolding techniques in writing instruction positively affects the students writing improvement, however, not large. The control group did not receive any scaffolding techniques; however, the experimental group received scaffolding techniques in paragraph writing instructions.

Keywords

Scaffolding, Scaffolding Techniques, Zone of proximal development

1.1 Introduction

Writing is an integral part of language teaching and learning process in which meaningful concepts and knowledge can be communicated through it (Chastain, 1988). It helps to establish organized thought patterns, powerful thinking capacity and efficiency to analyze and synthesize facts which are demanding and challenging in dealing with the academic world (Lane et. al., 2008). In spite of the important roles of writing, many students face many difficulties to correctly translate their ideas into a readable text (Richard and Renandya, 2002). As in several other parts of the world where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), Ethiopian foreign language learners suffer from weakness in writing (Dejene, 1990; Taddele, 1990; Hailemichael, 1993; Tassew, 1993; Awol 1999; Geremew, 1999; Italo, 1999; Solomon, 2004; Amlaku, 2010).

Based on these, a new writing pedagogy that emphasizes teaching ESL/EFL writing beyond language skills began to equip students with good writing skills in order for them to succeed in their education (Degi, 2005). The new teaching of writing which encourage interaction, focus on Vygotskian sociocultural theory was developed (Storch, 2005; 2007, Wiggleworth & Storch, 2009). In a socio-cultural theory of learning, guidance and support of a less able peer or learner takes place through interaction in a particular social context (Daniels, 2001; Vygotsky, 1986). In this case, the more able peer's role is to provide assistance and support which aids learners' knowledge construction (Gibbons, 2006). This guidance is often referred to as scaffolding. Scaffolding is the process of guiding the learner from what is presently known to what is to be known (Mercer & Fisher, 1992; Murphy, 1997). Scaffolding is a useful technique that encourages teachers' and students' active roles and interactions in the writing process. Within this technique, a teacher, or any other more knowledgeable other (MKO), activates and makes use of the learner's potential by scaffolding him/her within his/her zone of proximal development (ZPD).

1.2 Problem of the study

With the rise of English as a global language the ability to write well in English across diverse settings and for different audiences has become essential. Writing is the primary means by which students demonstrate their knowledge in school. It provides a flexible tool for gathering, remembering, and sharing subject-matter knowledge as well as an instrument for helping

children explore, organize and refine their ideas about a specific subject (Graham & Harris, 2005).

In spite of the important roles of writing, producing an effective and interesting written expression is an overwhelming task for all levels of Ethiopian students. Many studies in Ethiopia show that not only primary schools but also many secondary and tertiary students are not capable of using the English language effectively to carry out their academic activities successfully, and their writing ability is not satisfactory. (AyneAbeba,1993; Italo,1999). More specifically, high school students in Ethiopia have deficiency of the English language to compose up to the expected level (Awol 1999; Geremew, 1999; Italo, 1999; Amlaku, 2010; Solomon, 2004).

In the English language for Ethiopia syllabus, teachers are strongly advised to provide learners with appropriate support in language development which enable students communicate effectively in English at school and in their real life in all the skills (MOE, English Language Syllabuses, 2008). Hence, teachers provide various types of writing assistance to make their students function at a higher level. Some carefully design writing instructions that provided few opportunities for peer collaboration and self-directed learning. Others simply provide a correct answer when their students are confused. Hence, teachers provide various types of writing assistance to make their students function at a higher level. However, whether the instructional support or scaffolding adopted by the English language teachers will have a paramount impact on the degree of students writing success or not is not studied in the context of Ethiopia in general and the study area in particular. Therefore, inspired by sociocultural theory (SCT), this study made an attempt to find out whether teacher scaffolding techniques would have effects on high school students paragraph writing skills.

1.3. Literature review

Knowledge is not a set of facts, concepts, or rules that are ready to be picked up and remembered (Allan Pritchard and John Woppard) because, all learning, including language learning, is socially constructed. Based on the Vygotskian account of language learning, when second or foreign language learners interact with other language users such as teachers, native speakers or other learners, they can perform such language functions which they are not able to do by themselves. They can internalize these functions by practicing and learning to perform them

independently. This process involves "a progression from the inter-mental to intra-mental, as the learners shifts from object and other regulation to self-regulation" (Ellis, 2003:24). This can be achieved through a good teaching techniques that can simplify the structure of complex knowledge into simple knowledge structures to facilitate students in formulating various concepts, principles, propositions, and relevant information in order to build his/her own knowledge.

Teaching cannot be viewed as the transmission of knowledge from the enlightened to the unenlightened; constructivist teachers do not take the role of the "sage on the stage." Rather, teachers act as "guides on the side," who provide students with opportunities to test the adequacy of their current understandings (Hoover, 1996).

The sociocultural theory of Vygotsky emphasizes that learning takes place through interactions with other students, teachers, and the world-at-large (Vygotsky, 1978). The central concept in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is scaffolding. Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) were the first to use the term 'scaffolding' as a metaphor to capture the nature of support and guidance in learning. They used the term to describe the nature of parental tutoring in the language development of young children. In the context of classroom interaction, the term scaffolding has been taken up to portray the temporary assistance that teachers provide for their students in order to assist them to complete a task or develop new understandings, so that they will later be able to complete similar tasks alone. Maybin, Mercer and Steirer (1992) describe this as the "temporary but essential nature of the supportive interaction through which novices (e.g. learners) are assisted by experts (e.g., teachers or parents or peers) to develop new skills, concepts or higher levels of understanding to carry out tasks successfully. This support can be in posing questions, and giving feedback, examples, or explanations. In short, scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) is a tactic for helping the child in his or her zone of proximal development in which the adult provides hints and prompts at different levels. In scaffolding, the adult does not simplify the task, but the role of the learner is simplified "through the graduated intervention of the teacher" (Greenfield, 1984). For example, in a high school EFL writing sessions class, a teacher might provide scaffolding by first giving students detailed guides to write, then giving them brief

outlines that they might use to organize writing, and finally asking them to develop effective writing entirely on their own.

1.3. Overview of the study

This study aims at examining the effects of Teacher scaffolding techniques on high school students EFL paragraph writing: East Wollega zone in focus. There are certain reasons that make the current study significant. First of all, the study contributes to the related literature in the scope of the efficiency of scaffolding techniques. Then, it contributes to the literature in terms of the effects of the utilization of scaffolding techniques in EFL writing instruction. In other words, the study constitutes to the literature on the effectiveness of the use of scaffolding techniques on writing skills. Finally, the research is significant as it presents practical recommendations for teachers, learners, curriculum developers, material writers, and educational policy makers. By bearing these concerns in mind, different null hypotheses were designed to assess the effectiveness of using scaffolding techniques in EFL writing skills in the context of high school

2. Method

2.1. Subjects

In east Wollega, there were fifty two (52) government high schools In 2009 E.C. Out of these high schools, one school (Arjo high school) was selected through simple random sampling lottery method. In this school there were fourteen (14) grade 9 sections in 2009 E.C. Thus, out of these sections, two intact sections, section ‘D’ assigned as control and section ‘K’ assigned as an experimental group randomly. The control group section has 54 actual students and the experimental group section has 48 actual students during the study. The treatment was applied to the experimental group and conventional method was applied to the control group.

2.2. Tools

In order to obtain data for this study tests (pre & post) were used. Pre-test is used to check the similarity level of the two groups and posttest is used to test the effects of the scaffolding techniques on the students’ paragraph writing after the treatment. The tests were prepared by the researcher and subject teachers based on the minimum learning competencies (MLC) writing skills for grade nine (9).

2.3. Data analysis

The data collected through tests were analyzed using SPSS software. The paragraphs written by the subjects at the beginning and the end of the study were marked by two EFL instructors to obtain inter-rater reliability. As shown in Table 1, inter-rater reliability coefficients for pre- and post-test were calculated in Pearson product moment correlations. Data showed a high level of reliability. Then, descriptive Statistics: minimum, maximum, mean scores and standard deviations and correlations of scores for both pre- and post-tests were calculated. Finally, paired samples t-test values were found to compare the data obtained from control and experimental groups.

Table 1, inter-rater reliability coefficients

Scores	Pre-test mean score	Posttest mean score
Scorer 1	11.58	10.64
Scorer 2	10.70	12.00
Difference	0.88	-1.36

3. Findings

Table 1: Control and Experimental group pre-test Inter-Raters Scores Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control group pre-test rater 1 score	33	2	40	11.58	8.128
Control group pre-test rater 2 score	33	2	40	10.70	8.402
Experimental group pre-test rater 1 score	33	0	47	10.64	10.706
Experimental group pre-test rater 2 score	33	0	57	12.00	13.091
Valid N (listwise)	33				

Table 1 above shows that the difference between the mean scores of the control group pre-test raters (r1 & r2) score was only 0.88 and that of experimental group pre-test was -1.36. This indicates that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test raters in the control and experimental groups. This shows that there was consistency between the raters' scores of the group in the pre-test before the treatment.

Table 5.2: Control & Experimental group Pre-test Inter-raters' Scores Correlation

	Control group pre-test rater 1 score	Control group pre-test rater 2 score	Experimental group pre-test rater 1 score	Experimental group pre-test rater 2 score
Pearson Correlation	1	.792**	-.152	-.051
Control group pre-test rater 1 score Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.397	.776
N	33	33	33	33
Pearson Correlation	.792**	1	-.096	-.099
Control group pre-test rater 2 score Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.595	.585
N	33	33	33	33
Pearson Correlation	-.152	-.096	1	.856**
Experimental group pre-test rater 1 score Sig. (2-tailed)	.397	.595		.000
N	33	33	33	33
Pearson Correlation	-.051	-.099	.856**	1
Experimental group pre-test rater 2 score Sig. (2-tailed)	.776	.585	.000	
N	33	33	33	33

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table 2 above inter-raters correlation matrix shows that the relationship between control & experimental group pre-test inter-raters scores. The correlations were calculated using Pearson Correlation using SPSS version 20. The SPSS output indicates that the control group pre-test raters (rater 1 against rater 2) score correlation coefficient was 0.792 and that of the experimental group pre-test raters (rater 1 against rater 2) score correlation coefficient was 0.856. According to Yalew, (2006), the two raters (r1 & r2) in control group had 62.7% ($0.792 \times 0.792 \times 100$) similarities and 73.27 % ($0.856 \times 0.856 \times 100$) similarities in experimental group. This shows that there is a strong positive correlation between the raters' scores of the same paper showing a

considerable consistency with in the two groups. This also confirms that the closer the coefficients are to +1.0 and -1.0, the greater is the strength of the relationship between the variables. Thus, it is possible to conclude that there is a substantial relationship between the raters' scores of the two groups in the pre-test.

Table 3: Control and Experimental Group Posttest Inter-raters Scores Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control group posttest rater 1 score	33	0	30	10.30	9.515
Control group posttest rater 1score	33	0	30	9.39	8.993
Experimental group posttest rater 1 score	33	0	80	20.61	16.382
Experimental group posttest rater 1score	33	0	70	20.00	14.790
Valid N (listwise)	33				

The descriptive statistics result in table 3 shows that the difference between the mean scores of the control group posttest raters' (r1 & r2) scores was 0.91 and that of experimental was 0.61. This indicates that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the posttest raters' scores in both control and experimental groups. Thus, we can conclude that there is a high consistency between the raters' scores of the two groups in the posttest.

Table 4 Control and Experimental Group Posttest Inter-raters' Score Correlations

		Control group posttest rater score	Control group 1 posttest rater score	experimental group rater 1 posttest score	experimental group posttest rater 2 score
Control group posttestCorrelation rater 1 score	Pearson	1	.440*	-.242	-.067
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.010	.175	.713
	N	33	33	33	33
Control group posttestCorrelation rater 2 score	Pearson	.440*	1	-.040	.141
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010		.826	.434
	N	33	33	33	33
Experimental groupCorrelation posttest rater 1 score	Pearson	-.242	-.040	1	.735**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.175	.826		.000
	N	33	33	33	33
Experimental groupCorrelation posttest rater 2 score	Pearson	-.067	.141	.735**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.713	.434	.000	
	N	33	33	33	33

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As table 4 indicates, the correlation coefficient of control group posttest rater 1 against rater 2 was 0.440 and sig. is 0.01. The output result imply that a fairly moderate and positive correlation was found between the rater one (r1) of the control group and its rater two (r2) ($r=0.440$, $p< 0.05$). This indicates that the control group rater one (r1) and its rater two (r2) in the sample share 19.36 percent of their variation in common. Whereas, the experimental group posttest rater 1 against rater 2 was $r = 0.735$ and $sig. = 0.000$. The output result imply that a fairly substantial and positive correlation was found between the rater one (r1) of the experimental and its rater two (r2) ($r=0.735$, $p< 0.01$). In other words, the experimental group rater one (r1) and its

rater two (r_2) in the sample share 54 percent of their variation in common. This led us to conclude that there is a positive correlation between raters' scores variables in both control and experimental group in the posttest. In short, the result indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the scores given to the same script by two different markers in both control and experimental groups the pre- and the posttest raters' result.

Table 5 Control & Experimental Group Pre-test Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval	of the			
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Control group pre-test average score – Experimental group pre-test average score	-0.18182	14.55476	2.53366	-5.34271	4.97907	-0.72	32	.943

Table 5 shows the paired samples test of the control & experimental groups pre-test scores. The result in the table shows that the mean scores difference of the control group of 33 students and the experimental group of 33 students is -0.18182 for the pre-test. The standard deviation of the control and the experimental group is 14.55476 and their Std. Error Mean is 2.53366 in the pre-test. Regarding the t-value and the p-value, the t-value is -0.72, and the p-value is 0.943. It can be concluded that the above mean scores of the two group (i.e control and experimental) is statistically insignificant indicating that the groups were almost at the same level before the experiment. Hence, there was homogeneity between the scores of the groups in the pre-test. Therefore, any difference between the groups in scores on the paragraph writing skills test that might occur after the experiment would be attributable to the employment of scaffolding techniques of writing instructions. This proves that null hypotheses 1 (H_0) is accepted.

Table 6 Control & Experimental Group Posttest Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference							
				Lower	Upper						
Pair 1 Control group posttest average score – Experimental group posttest average score	-9.84848	17.11564	2.97945	-15.91743	-3.77954	-3.305	32	.002			

Table 6 presents that the paired samples test of the control & experimental groups' posttest scores. The result shows that the mean difference of the control group of 33 students and the experimental group of 33 students is -9.84848 for the posttest. The standard deviation of the control and the experimental group is 17.11564 and their Std. Error mean is 2.97945 in posttest. Regarding the t-value and the p-value, the t-value is -3.305, and the p-value is 0.002. The mean scores of the two groups (i.e control and experimental) was found to be statistically significant indicating that the level of the students in the experimental group was higher than the level of those in the control group in paragraph writing posttest. In other words, the experimental group made significant difference over its posttest compared to that of the control group posttest score. Thus, though the improvement is not as such high, we can conclude that the teacher's scaffolding techniques implementations had a positive effect on the paragraph writing skills of the experimental group students. Hence, hypothesis 2 (H_0) was rejected.

Table 7 Control Group Pre-test and Posttest Paired Samples statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Control group pre-test score	11.1364	33	7.82451	1.36207
	14.3939	33	9.16494	1.59541

Table 7 shows that the control group pre-test and posttest mean score were 11.1364 and 14.3939 respectively. The mean difference of the two score was 3.2575. The standard deviation for pre-test and posttest were 7.82451 and 9.16494 respectively. The standard error mean for the control

group in pre-test and posttest were 1.26207 and 1.59541 respectively. Therefore, the difference between the above two scores was found to be statistically insignificant indicating that the control group made no significant difference over its posttest compared to that of its pre-test. Hence, the null hypothesis 3 (H_0_3) was accepted.

Table 8 Control Group Pre-test and Posttest Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference							
				Lower	Upper						
Pair 1	Control group pre-test score	-3.25758	7.38783	1.28606	-5.87719	-.63797	-2.533	32 .016			
	Control group posttest score										

The control group pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed using paired sample t-test as shown in table 8. The result of the analysis indicates that the mean scores difference between the pre- and posttest of the group was -3.25758, the standard deviation and standard error mean being 7.38783 and 1.28606 respectively. The t-value and p-value were found to be -2.533 and 0.016 respectively, which means that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the students in the control group in the pre-test and their mean scores in the posttest. Hence, the null hypothesis 3 (H_0_3) was accepted.

Table 9 Experimental Group Pre-test and Posttest Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Experimental group pre-test score	11.3182	33	11.46790
	Experimental group posttest score	24.2424	33	13.69998

Table 9 shows that the experimental group pre-test mean score was 11.3182 and its posttest mean score was 24.2424. The mean difference of the two score was 12.9242. The standard deviation for pre-test and posttest were 11.46790 and 13.69998 respectively. The standard error mean for

the experimental group in pre-test and posttest were 1.99631 and 2.38486 respectively. Therefore, the difference between the two mean scores was found to be statistically significant indicating that the experimental group made significant difference over its posttest compared to that of the control group.

Table 10 Experimental Group Pre-test and Posttest Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference								
				Lower	Upper							
Pair 1	Experimental group pre-test score	-12.92424	9.86401	1.71710	-16.42187	-9.42662	-7.527	32	.000			
	Experimental group posttest score											

The data obtained from the paragraph writing pre-test and posttest scores of the experimental group were analyzed in table 10 using paired samples t-test. The analysis result indicates that the mean score difference between the pre- and posttest of the group was -12.92424. The standard deviation and standard error mean being 9.86401 and 1.71710 respectively. The t-value and p-value were -7.527 and 0.000 respectively, indicating that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the students in the experimental group in the pre-test and their mean scores in the post-test. This result is an evidence to reject the fourth hypothesis (H_04). This led us to conclude that the level of the experimental group students' paragraph writing was improved as a result of their exposure to the teacher's scaffolding techniques implementations during the experiment.

4. Conclusions

In general, the mean score for the control group was (11.1364) in pre-test and (14.3939) in post-test. Their scores ranged from 3 to 35 out of 100 in pre-test and 0-35out of 100 in posttest. The mean score for experimental group was (11.3182) in pre-test and (24.2424) in posttest. Their scores ranged from 0 to 52 out of 100 for pre-test and 0-75out of 100 for posttest. There were close means between the two tests in the control group. One can see that the difference between the two means is not significant ($14.3939 - 11.1364 = 3.2575$). But in the experimental group, the mean of post-test was about 13 points greater than pre-test(posttest,24.2424- pre-test 11.3182=12.9242). There was difference in paragraph writing skills before and after the teacher's scaffolding techniques employment in the experimental group writing instructions. However, the results indicated that the current study found that the teacher's scaffolding technique employment in the EFL writing instructions provides a small transfer effect on students paragraph writing skills in comparing gain of a scaffolding and non-scaffolding group. Hence, the improvement is not highly significant because of certain factors in the experimental group.

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