

Teacher's Scaffolding Strategies in Teaching Essay Writing: A Descriptive Qualitative Study

Rinda

Institut Agama Islam Uluwiyah Mojokerto
rinda@lecturer.uluwiyah.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to explore the scaffolding strategies employed by an English teacher in teaching essay writing and to examine how students respond to these strategies in an EFL context. The research was conducted at MA Unggulan Al Kautsar Mojokerto with Class X students as participants. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of students' writing products. The findings reveal that the teacher employed various scaffolding techniques, including modeling, guided brainstorming, prompting, questioning, and real-time feedback across the pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing stages. These strategies helped students better understand essay structures, develop their ideas, and improve their writing organization and coherence. Moreover, students responded positively, reporting increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and improved confidence in writing. The study supports Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as the scaffolding facilitated learners' progression toward independent writing. It is concluded that teacher scaffolding is an effective pedagogical strategy that enhances both cognitive and affective aspects of essay writing in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: scaffolding, essay writing, EFL students, writing instruction, qualitative study

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a fundamental skill in English language learning, yet it remains one of the most challenging areas for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. Among the various forms of writing, essay writing poses even greater difficulties due to its demand for critical thinking, logical organization, coherence, and grammatical accuracy (Hyland, 2019). For senior high school students—especially those who are still at the initial stage of academic writing—constructing a well-organized and cohesive essay often becomes a daunting task. These difficulties arise not only from limited linguistic competence but also from underdeveloped cognitive and metacognitive strategies, as well as a lack of familiarity with academic genres (Chen & Lin, 2021). As a result, many students struggle to express their ideas in structured and persuasive ways. This condition calls for the application of

appropriate instructional strategies that provide structured and gradual support tailored to students' readiness and proficiency levels. One such promising and research-based approach is scaffolding.

Scaffolding, which stems from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning, refers to the temporary assistance given by a more knowledgeable person to help learners accomplish tasks they cannot yet perform independently (Vygotsky, 1978). The support is gradually removed as the learner gains competence, allowing them to eventually master the skill on their own. In the context of EFL writing instruction, scaffolding may take the form of modeling, prompting, guiding questions, collaborative brainstorming, corrective feedback, and structured revision tasks (Hammond, 2001; Liu & Stapleton, 2020). Through these strategies, students are able to internalize complex writing processes, learn genre conventions, and develop their voice and critical thinking skills—all within a supportive learning environment.

In recent years, a number of empirical studies have explored the role of scaffolding in developing students' writing abilities. Febriyanti (2020), for instance, examined teacher's scaffolding talk in a vocational high school writing class and found that modeling and prompting helped students better structure their paragraphs. Sari and Suwandi (2021) demonstrated that scaffolding significantly enhanced students' argumentative writing skills, particularly in terms of idea development and organization. Similarly, Wahyuni and Fauziati (2023) found that structured teacher assistance improved the clarity and flow of students' descriptive texts. Abdullah and Yusuf (2022) highlighted the use of peer scaffolding and guided feedback as tools to increase learner engagement and motivation in writing. Furthermore, Rahmawati (2019) emphasized that scaffolding—especially in the form of guided writing—helped students reduce their anxiety and gain confidence in expressing their ideas. Other scholars such as Alshahrani (2020), Kusumaningrum (2020), and Nguyen (2022) have added to the discussion by exploring the integration of scaffolding in digital environments and the use of peer-assisted scaffolding in academic writing.

Despite the growing body of literature, several gaps remain in current research. First, most studies on scaffolding in writing instruction have been conducted at the tertiary level, focusing on university students or pre-service teachers. Second, many of these studies tend to address general writing instruction or paragraph-level texts, such as descriptive or narrative writing, rather than full-length essays. Third, few studies have investigated scaffolding practices as they unfold in real-time classroom interaction, particularly at the senior high school level, where students are still transitioning into formal academic writing. Lastly, student perceptions of the scaffolding they receive—how they experience it, what types they find most helpful, and how it affects their confidence and motivation—are often overlooked (Gunawan & Widodo, 2019; Al-Saleem & Fakhouri, 2023). Understanding these perspectives is critical for developing more responsive, student-centered pedagogical strategies.

This study seeks to address those gaps by focusing on how a teacher scaffolds essay writing instruction in a senior high school EFL classroom and how students respond to those scaffolding strategies. Essay writing is particularly relevant because it requires students to demonstrate higher-order thinking, develop arguments, synthesize ideas, and organize content cohesively—skills that demand intensive instructional mediation. In the Indonesian educational context, the ability to write essays in English is increasingly emphasized in national assessments and is a critical requirement for success in higher education. However, most students in this context lack strong foundations in academic writing and often receive limited support in developing those skills.

The research was conducted at MA Unggulan Al Kautsar Mojokerto, a faith-based senior high school known for integrating academic and character education. The focus was on Class X students, who were beginning to learn essay writing in a formal setting. The teacher involved in this study employed various scaffolding techniques across different stages of the writing process: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, using classroom observations, interviews, and students' written work to analyze the nature and effectiveness of the scaffolding strategies used. The theoretical framework that underpins this study is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which asserts that learning occurs most effectively when learners are assisted in tasks they cannot yet perform independently but can accomplish with appropriate support.

Therefore, the aim of this study is twofold: first, to describe the scaffolding strategies used by the teacher in teaching essay writing; and second, to examine students' responses to those strategies. The findings are expected to provide insights for English teachers, particularly those in EFL contexts, on how to design and implement effective scaffolding that not only addresses students' academic needs but also nurtures their confidence and independence as writers. Furthermore, this study aims to contribute to curriculum development and teacher education by offering evidence-based recommendations on scaffolding practices that are both pedagogically sound and contextually relevant.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate the scaffolding strategies used by an English teacher in teaching essay writing and to explore how students responded to these strategies. A qualitative method was deemed appropriate to gain an in-depth understanding of classroom practices and participant experiences in a natural setting. The research was conducted at MA Unggulan Al Kautsar Mojokerto, an Islamic senior high school located in East Java, Indonesia. The participants included one English teacher and 28 students of Class X, selected purposively based on their involvement in an essay writing unit at the time of the study. The teacher had over five years of teaching experience and was known for implementing interactive learning strategies. The students were at an intermediate level of English proficiency and had previously been introduced to basic paragraph writing.

Data were gathered through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of students' writing samples. Classroom observations were carried out over four essay writing sessions, focusing on identifying the types of scaffolding strategies used, such as modeling, prompting, questioning, and guided practice. Field notes were taken to record teacher-student interactions and classroom dynamics. Interviews were conducted with the teacher and six representative students to gain insights into their perceptions and experiences related to the scaffolding process. Additionally, two writing drafts from each student were collected and examined to observe developments in structure, coherence, and idea development.

The data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework, consisting of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction phase, all observation notes and interview transcripts were coded and categorized into emerging themes. These themes were then organized and visually displayed in charts and matrices to identify patterns and relationships. Conclusions were drawn by interpreting these patterns in light of relevant theories and prior studies. To ensure the validity of the findings,

the study employed triangulation of data sources, member checking with the teacher, and peer debriefing with another English educator. These strategies were implemented to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research process and results.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that the teacher at MA Unggulan Al Kautsar Mojokerto employed a range of scaffolding strategies to assist Class X students in the process of essay writing. These strategies were observed consistently throughout the stages of instruction—pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing—and were found to play a significant role in helping students develop both the structure and content of their essays.

In the pre-writing stage, the teacher frequently used modeling by presenting sample essays and analyzing them together with the class. This allowed students to recognize the structure of a five-paragraph essay, including the introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. The teacher also facilitated guided brainstorming, encouraging students to share ideas collectively and organize their thoughts using mind maps. These activities reflect what Hammond (2001) describes as “macro-scaffolding,” in which the teacher supports learners through structured planning of tasks.

During the while-writing stage, the teacher applied prompting and questioning techniques to assist students in expanding their ideas. As students drafted their essays, the teacher circulated around the classroom, offering individual guidance such as, “What example can you give here?” or “How could you support this argument?” These strategies helped students stay focused and think critically about their content, in line with Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which posits that learners benefit from assistance that targets skills just beyond their current abilities. Moreover, the teacher provided real-time corrective feedback on grammar, sentence structure, and organization, which students could directly apply to their drafts.

In the post-writing stage, the teacher guided students through revision activities by highlighting common errors and discussing strategies for improvement. The use of peer feedback was also introduced, although in a limited and teacher-supervised format, to foster collaboration and develop students' self-editing skills. Students were asked to review their classmates' essays using a simple rubric, which promoted awareness of the writing criteria and further internalized the structure of academic writing.

Regarding students' responses, interview data suggested that the majority of students felt that the scaffolding strategies were helpful and motivating. They appreciated the step-by-step approach and found it easier to organize their ideas and complete their essays with the teacher's guidance. Several students mentioned that the examples and individual assistance reduced their anxiety and made the task feel more manageable. These findings resonate with previous studies (e.g., Sari & Suwandi, 2021; Abdullah & Yusuf, 2022), which concluded that teacher scaffolding significantly enhances students' writing confidence and competence, especially in the early stages of essay writing.

Overall, the findings highlight that teacher scaffolding is not only a supportive strategy but also a developmental tool, enabling students to gradually become more independent writers. The structured yet flexible assistance provided by the teacher contributed to better essay organization, clearer arguments, and improved language use among students. These outcomes

affirm the importance of incorporating scaffolding into EFL writing instruction, particularly for learners who are new to academic writing conventions.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate a consistent pattern regarding the positive impact of teacher scaffolding strategies on students' essay writing development. The general trend reveals that structured support in the form of modeling, prompting, questioning, and feedback significantly helped students navigate the complex process of essay writing. This confirms that scaffolding is not merely an instructional aid but a crucial pedagogical approach that fosters student independence over time.

These findings are in line with those of Febriyanti (2020) and Wahyuni & Fauziati (2023), who found that teacher scaffolding enhances students' participation and understanding during writing instruction. In particular, the modeling of essay structures and the guided brainstorming process echo the practices observed in Febriyanti's study, where teacher-led demonstrations enabled students to internalize genre conventions. Similarly, the individual guidance and real-time feedback found in the present study resonate with Abdullah & Yusuf (2022), who reported that scaffolding through prompting and peer discussion improved student motivation and engagement in writing tasks.

Moreover, this study reinforces Sari & Suwandi's (2021) assertion that scaffolding supports the development of argumentative structures in students' writing. Although the current research focused on general essay writing rather than argumentative essays specifically, the same principles apply: students require structured and sustained support to effectively express their ideas and organize them logically.

The results of this study also confirm the theoretical foundation drawn from Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The teacher's role in identifying students' current abilities and providing targeted assistance to help them move toward independent writing is evident throughout the three stages of instruction. As learners become more competent, the teacher gradually withdraws support, which reflects the core idea of scaffolding as proposed by Vygotsky and elaborated by Hammond (2001).

No contradictory evidence emerged that challenges the underlying theory; instead, the findings strengthen the theoretical framework and highlight its practical applicability in EFL classrooms, particularly in essay writing instruction for senior high school students. The implications of this study suggest that teachers should be trained to incorporate scaffolding systematically into their writing instruction, paying close attention to student needs at different stages of the writing process.

Furthermore, the positive responses from students imply that scaffolding also plays an affective role—it reduces anxiety, builds confidence, and encourages persistence in writing. These outcomes highlight the dual impact of scaffolding: cognitive and emotional. Therefore, scaffolding should not be viewed only as an academic strategy but also as a supportive relational approach that helps EFL learners feel more capable and engaged.

In conclusion, the findings support previous studies and confirm the theoretical perspective used in this research. The practical implications emphasize the need for professional development for teachers, curriculum design that includes structured scaffolding

opportunities, and the use of scaffolding as an essential part of teaching writing in EFL settings.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study set out to explore how an English teacher applied scaffolding strategies in the teaching of essay writing to senior high school students, and how those strategies influenced students' learning experience and writing development. The research was conducted in an EFL context at MA Unggulan Al Kautsar Mojokerto, involving Class X students who were at the early stage of learning to write academic essays in English. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study gathered data through classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. The overall findings confirm that scaffolding plays a vital role in helping EFL learners build their writing competence gradually and meaningfully.

The study revealed that the teacher systematically used a range of scaffolding strategies aligned with the stages of the writing process: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. During the pre-writing phase, the teacher engaged students in structured brainstorming activities and introduced sample essays to model the target genre. These actions helped activate prior knowledge and guided students to formulate clear essay structures before they began writing. This modeling strategy allowed students to visualize what was expected of them and provided a concrete example that they could refer to during their writing. It also served as a cognitive scaffold, reducing the abstractness of academic essay conventions, which are often difficult for EFL learners to grasp.

In the while-writing stage, the teacher employed prompting and guiding questions as key scaffolding tools. These included specific questions such as, "What example can you provide for this argument?" or "Can you elaborate this idea further?" which not only encouraged critical thinking but also helped students extend their ideas coherently. Immediate feedback was also a central feature of the scaffolding process during this phase. Instead of delaying comments until the final product, the teacher addressed issues in real time, enabling students to correct mistakes and revise their work on the spot. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as the teacher provided support just beyond the students' current capabilities, allowing them to perform tasks they could not do independently.

In the post-writing phase, the teacher focused on guided revision and peer review. These scaffolding practices aimed to reinforce the importance of self-correction and reflection in the writing process. Students were given a simplified rubric to assess their peers' work, which served both as a metacognitive tool and as a platform for collaborative learning. Through this activity, students not only learned to identify writing issues in others' work but also became more aware of similar issues in their own essays. The teacher also provided feedback that focused on both content and form, further strengthening students' understanding of academic writing conventions.

Students' responses to these scaffolding strategies were overwhelmingly positive. Based on interview data, most students reported feeling more confident in their writing, noting that the teacher's step-by-step guidance helped them generate and organize ideas more effectively. Many expressed that writing an essay, which initially seemed daunting, became a manageable task due to the structured support provided throughout the process. Some students also highlighted that the opportunity to ask questions during the writing process and receive

immediate assistance helped them avoid getting stuck, which had often been a barrier in previous writing experiences. This shows that scaffolding does not merely address the cognitive aspect of writing but also plays a crucial role in shaping students' affective engagement—reducing anxiety, building motivation, and fostering persistence.

The results of this study support earlier findings in the field of EFL writing instruction. As noted by Sari and Suwandi (2021), effective scaffolding enhances not only students' argumentative skills but also their ability to construct coherent and well-organized writing. Similarly, this study confirms the argument made by Hammond (2001) that scaffolding must be intentional, targeted, and gradually released to empower learners. The teacher in this study did not merely provide general assistance but adapted scaffolding strategies to students' needs at each stage of the writing process, which made the instruction more meaningful and learner-centered.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study reaffirms the relevance of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in explaining how learning occurs through mediated assistance within social interaction. The classroom served as a dynamic environment where the teacher functioned as a more capable peer who provided cognitive and emotional scaffolding, enabling students to reach beyond their current level of competence. Importantly, the findings highlight the need for teachers to be responsive and flexible in their support, continually assessing student progress and adjusting the scaffolding accordingly.

Based on the findings, several suggestions can be offered. First, English teachers in EFL contexts are encouraged to systematically implement scaffolding strategies in teaching writing, particularly at the essay level where cognitive demands are higher. Scaffolding should be incorporated not only as a teaching technique but also as part of curriculum planning, ensuring that writing instruction is progressive and student-centered. Teachers should also be trained to identify when and how to offer scaffolding, as timing and relevance are key factors that determine its effectiveness.

Second, teacher education programs and professional development workshops should include modules on scaffolding practices, especially those specific to writing instruction. Many teachers may already use elements of scaffolding intuitively, but formal training can help them refine their strategies and apply them more purposefully. In addition, sharing best practices among teachers through reflective forums or teaching communities can encourage the adaptation of effective scaffolding techniques across different classroom contexts.

Third, future research may expand this study by exploring scaffolding strategies across different genres of writing (such as narrative, analytical, or reflective writing), or by comparing their effectiveness at various levels of proficiency (beginner, intermediate, advanced). Another possible direction is to examine the integration of digital tools into scaffolding processes, especially in blended or online learning environments. The use of collaborative platforms, writing apps, or AI-assisted feedback may offer new possibilities for real-time, individualized support.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of teacher scaffolding as a transformative approach in teaching essay writing. Through structured and responsive support, teachers can help EFL learners overcome writing challenges, develop academic literacy, and gain confidence as independent writers. As writing continues to be a critical skill in both academic and professional settings, effective scaffolding remains a key to unlocking students' potential and supporting their growth as communicators in the global context.

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